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THE LIFE OF JOHN KEATS

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THE LIFE OF JOHN KEATS

BY

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Translated from the French

BY

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Preface by

J. MIDDLETON MURRAY

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PREFACE

NEITHER Sid Sidney Colvin's nor Miss Amy Lowell's biography of Keats will easily be superseded; but they are big and expensive books. Something more readily accessible is required. By M. Erlande's *Life* the need is met.

And it has the added interest of giving a French view of an achievement which seems to most of us peculiarly English. But seeing that recently another French critic, M. Lucien Wolff, has produced another admirable study of the poet, we may conclude with satisfaction that there is nothing essentially inaccessible to the Latin mind in Keats's life, or thought, or poetry.

I am glad to think that M. Erlande's task did not fall upon me. To write a simple life of Keats would have been wholly beyond my powers. To my sense there is a perfection of beauty manifest in that life, an organic and inevitable destiny, which I should never have dared to abridge. M. Erlande has dared, and dared, I think, successfully.

There is a mystery in the life of Keats. It is complete and perfect as an object for contemplation; yet it ended in pain that is almost unendurable to behold. One lives it through, as one lives through a greater life than his, to receive something that might fittingly be called a revelation. One feels that, in some obscure sense, such a life contains an answer to the problem of pain.

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Of course, it does not contain such an answer. To that question there is no answer save in the realisation that we must cease to ask it. Keats was a great poet. We turn to him, we study him, we love him; and he lives anew in us. He has his immortality. If all who suffered as much could be as sure of their ultimate reward, we should not be troubled nor our souls disquieted. But what of Tom Keats? He also suffered and died, younger than Keats, with no accomplishment.

Yet he also has his immortality. Not merely as Keats's brother whom we love because Keats loved him; not merely because his birthday was the occasion of the lovely sonnet, which tells of a felicity which the Keatses but rarely knew —

'Small busy flames play through the fresh laid coals' —

but because his agony, and the greater agony of the brother who watched him die, imperishably suffuses the aching majesty of 'Hyperion.'

I may be deluded; but therein I find a parable, or a hint of the mystery. May it not veritably be that the countless sufferers, whose unrequited pain makes every thinking man at some time 'a fever of himself,' have each their immortality in some living soul that has loved and cared for them? *De mortis nil nisi bonum,* says the old injunction. I have observed that it does not need to be obeyed. In those who have loved men and women who died young, the good, the beautiful, the exquisite, in their beloved alone survives. What was weak and unworthy in them, if there was any such, is all forgotten; all that was precious endures; not only endures, but lives, and richly lives, in some new

tenderness towards affliction, some new impulse to generosity, some secret well of life-renewing tears.

Men may say: There is no answer there. The young ones suffered and died. What was this immortality to them? Their life was cruelly taken. Does the love which thousands to-day feel in their hearts for Keats obliterate his anguish when he cried: 'Oh, Brown, I have coals of fire in my heart. It surprises me that the human heart is capable of containing and bearing such misery. Was I born for this end?'

No, this cannot be obliterated. But there is an end even to pain. Life we know; but death we do not know. It may be it is more easeful than even Keats once dreamed it was. Is it vain imagination that senses the approach of some serener majesty in Keats's heroic words: 'Severn — I — lift me up — I am dying — I shall die easy — don't be frightened — be firm, and thank God it has come.'

Death we do not know; yet if we may guess at its secret, perhaps it is that all men 'die easy' at the last. They pass back into the unimaginable comfort of the hidden unity of life, from which birth and existence have divided them. It claims its own again. What was to be loved in them we love, while we are capable of loving. When we too pass the serene gates of death, we shall be as they, 'neither marrying nor giving in marriage,' neither loving nor seeking love, caught back into the absolute integrity of that which is beyond life, as it was before it.

The thought of 'a Poet's death' once visited the strangely self-prophetic mind of Keats; 'the calmest thoughts come

round us,' he wrote, when the gentle south wind whispers of spring after winter. And of these calmest thoughts the chief and final was a Poet's death. Others of those thoughts were to come again — 'leaves budding' — 'If poetry come not natural as the leaves to a tree, it had better not come at all'; 'fruit ripening in stillness' —

> 'It is as if the rose should pluck herself
> Or the ripe plum finger its misty bloom;'

'Autumn suns smiling at eve upon the quiet sheaves' — one does not need to recall 'The Ode to Autumn'.

The inscrutable calm of growth is in all these; therefore it was also in the thought of 'a Poet's death,' which crowned them. Yet — 'Oh, Brown, I have coals of fire in my heart.' Had the prophetic soul failed him? I do not believe that any man who submits himself to the story of Keats's life and death will say that it did fail him. There is calm in that death, as the ending of that life; there is calm in the soul which contemplates it. The unknown self of Keats had spoken, as it was to speak so often and so wonderfully in this work; and, I think, when a man is such that the unknown self can reach through him to utterance, 'natural as the leaves to a tree,' it can never lie.

J. Middleton Murray

INTRODUCTION

MENTION the name of Keats in a mixed company, and somebody will murmur: 'A thing of beauty is a joy for ever.' Someone else may call to mind the poet's epitaph, 'Here lies one whose name was writ in water.' And yet others will name a poem: 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'; but of his other poems few will be mentioned.

I am not writing for 'specialists' in English literature, and therefore I shall not give here a list of those books in which the most recent biographical information about the poet is to be found. Such a list will be found at the end of my book, if I should succeed in rousing the curiosity of my readers sufficiently to make them wish to consult it. It is my object to give a picture of Keats that will show him to them as he was; with his human heart, and with that heart of flame which ultimately consumed him: Keats, whose life, which to the casual glance seems singularly empty of romantic elements, has none the less a pathos which the stormier destiny of Byron for example, never possessed. I shall try to present him in his rightful place, which is with the great figures in the world of poetry. I had written first of all 'Pure Poetry.' 'Pure' I struck out, lest that qualifying adjective might seem to contain some allusion to those controversies with which men of eminence are now engaged. I prefer to remain a stranger to such diversions.

I hope, also, to bring before their eyes the livery stable at Finsbury, at the sign of the Swan and Hoop, where Keats was born; the little room in the Piazza di Spagna where he fell eternally asleep; the grave where he rests, near the pyramid of Caius Cestus, under the daisies which he felt growing over him — of which Shelley wrote that 'it might almost make one in love with death to think that one should be buried in so sweet a place.' I hope, above all, that the enigmatic Fanny Brawne, so variously judged, may at all events take her place amongst those who have cast lights and shadows on the lives of great men.

Keats was not, as so many others are, a poet of the world. It was not lack of genius that prevented his being so, but lack of time, together with his dislike of political agitation and scandal.

The first of his poems which he thought worthy of publication belonged to the spring of 1815, his last to the winter of 1820.

Furthermore, he held that instruction was a capital crime in literature, as both Edgar Poe and Baudelaire were subsequently to think. We ought to consider the word in the sense which Victor Hugo and Sully Prudhomme gave it; or perhaps we should replace it by 'philosophy'; their philosophy.

Keats's æstheticism, his temperament, for the man and the artist in him were always one, forbade him to be didactic. He wrote in February 1818 to Reynolds, shortly before the publication of *Endymion:*

'We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us, and, if we do not agree, seems to put its hand into its breeches pocket. Poetry should be great and unobtrusive' (so Mallarmé thought, too) 'a thing which enters into one's soul, and does not startle it or amaze it with itself — but with its subject.' (And we shall see later what scope he gave to this word.) 'How beautiful are the retired flowers! — how they would lose their beauty were they to throng into the highway, crying out, "Admire me, I am a violet! Dote upon me, I am a primrose!"'

Keats never laid bare his sufferings in his work after the manner of Musset. His modesty was so complete, his mastery over himself so strong, that even his most intimate friends never dared to speak to him of the passion inspired in him by Fanny Brawne, of which the secret never escaped him until the moment when, without hope of cure, he left London to go and die in Italy. Sidney Colvin respected that reserve, and suppressed, in his edition of the *Letters,* those to Fanny Brawne, as being too distressing. Buxton Forman was less reticent, and his publication of these letters shocked people. Can there be any better proof of this than Matthew Arnold's opinion, in his essay on Keats's love letters?

'It is the sort of love letter of a surgeon's apprentice which one might hear read out in a breach of promise case, or in the Divorce Court. The sensuous man speaks in it, and the sensuous man of a badly bred and badly trained sort.' It is fair to add that, in the same essay, commenting on Keats's sentence, 'I think that I shall be among the English poets

after my death,' Arnold declares: 'He is; he is with Shakespeare.' And that is also the opinion of Mr. Middleton Murry, to whom we owe the most penetrating study of Keats hitherto published.

Thanks to this correspondence, Keats appears to us just as he was, just as he *knew*, and judged of himself, just as he appeared to his friends, and, striking fact, to his publishers, for whom he was a bad financial proposition. Yet they were so closely attached to him that one of them, Richard Woodhouse, copied out and dated not only his poems, but also the variations and the smallest fragments, verse or prose, that came from his pen. These manuscripts and papers, carefully preserved at the Morgan Library, and placed at the disposal of all who cared to use them, have been examined with the profit that may be imagined, by Amy Lowell; they have thrown a clearer light on Keats, and revealed him as an intensely human being; one who, in the midst of incessant material difficulties and moral anguish, could say whimsically that he had moulted, and congratulate himself on having exchanged his featherless wings for a 'pair of patient sublunary legs.'

The sensitiveness of youth is usually touched to the quick by Shelley and Byron, just as it is by Hugo and Lamartine; and, as I have often noticed, the same paths lead to Keats and Baudelaire — and once under the influence of these magicians it is impossible to escape from an enchantment which captivates mind, heart, and senses alike. The public whom they conquer remains theirs for ever, and all poetry compared to theirs seems tinkling and trivial.

INTRODUCTION

Keats's letters are unique in epistolary literature and quite indispensable, if one is to understand the quality, the extent, the variety, the soundness of his genius, the ardour of his temperament.

Shelley's letters, like Byron's, date; Keats's might have been written yesterday. Those addressed to Fanny Brawne do not show us a 'Keats who was no longer Keats,' according to Sir Sidney Colvin's expression, but Keats a prey to terrors, which in his prophetic, sensitive soul, were born of a passion which he knew to be hopeless, and which was irritated and transformed by the demons of jealousy. His letters addressed to his family and friends were playful, witty, sarcastic, humorous, of an exquisite delicacy, full of imagination, melancholy, wisdom, that good sense peculiar to poets which gives their worth to Musset's *Comédies*, Heine's *Florentinische Nächte,* the *Souvenirs* of Banville. In addition, they contain judgments on his work and on people — his predecessors, his contemporaries, kings, writers, politicians, actors, and his own writings — of which the justice and accuracy proclaim a strong and supple intellect; a philosophy of life and art capable of taxing the imagination of the most exacting reader.

One of the latest commentators of Keats, Clarence DeWitt Thorpe, remarks (*The Mind of John Keats,* New York, 1926) that in the volume published in honour of the poet's centenary two writers, Arthur Lynch and Clutton-Brock, explicitly call Keats a philosophical poet.

Arthur Lynch writes: 'Keats was a philosopher first, and a poet afterwards.' Clutton-Brock: 'Keats was a philosophic

poet, and for that very reason he fell into no philosophic errors in his conception of poetry.' In the *John Keats Memorial Volume* (my quotations are taken entirely from Mr. Thorpe) Mr. E. de Selincourt insists on the direct relation between Keats's artistic development and that of his intellect. Mr. Bernard Shaw, with the evident desire to be disconcerting, announces that in Keats there was a germ of Bolshevism and that, had he lived, he might have become a propagandist and a prophet.

We have travelled a long way since the day when George William Dawson could write:

> 'Byron and Shelley were both filled with the fervour of the revolutionary spirit; but in Keats there is no trace of either. He had no interest in man. In the passion and struggle of ordinary human life he discovered no food for poetry. . . . The only thought he has elaborated in all his writings is that beauty is worthy of worship, and loveliness should be worshipped for its own sake. The worship of loveliness he thus substituted for the worship of truth, and this seems to have satisfied all the religious instincts of his nature.'

No less brilliant is the following paragraph taken from M. Jusserand's abridged history of English literature. In this book a page and a half is devoted to Keats. It is a good deal when one reflects that Taine disposes of the author of the *Ode to a Nightingale* and the *Eve of Saint Agnes* in a few lines, after having conferred on him an order in paganism. Coleridge was not considered worth more attention.

'The demon of philosophy,' says Jusserand, 'agitated the soul of Shelley, and troubled it to the point of filling it with darkness and tempests; Shelley's passion for reform penetrates even into his love poetry. For these dreams and aspirations Keats cared nothing, reformation was not his business; to admire, to desire, to love, that was the occupation of his soul and heart. He admires, he desires, he loves to the point of suffering and death; all beauty moves him; nothing which is not beauty touches him. "Beauty," he says, "is Truth; Truth Beauty, that is all Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know!" There is no moral action or intention in his poetry.'

And here is Keats's answer:

'Scenery is fine, but human nature is finer.'

'I would jump down Ætna for any great Public good — but I hate a Mawkish Popularity.'

And what are we to make of his wish to sacrifice all his energy to the realisation of some beautiful dream of humanity?

'I was proposing to travel over the North this summer. There is but one thing to prevent me. — I know nothing — I have read nothing — and I mean to follow Solomon's directions, "Get learning — get understanding." I find earlier days are gone by — I find that I can have no enjoyment in the world but continual drinking of knowl-

edge. I find there is no worthy pursuit but the idea of doing some good for the world. — Some do it with their Society — some with their wit — some with their benevolence — some with a sort of power of conferring pleasure and good-humour on all they meet — and in a thousand ways, all dutiful to the command of great Nature — there is but one way for me. The road lies through application, study, and thought. — I will pursue it; and for that end, purpose retiring for some years. I have been hovering for some time between an exquisite sense of the luxurious, and a love for philosophy, — were I calculated for the former, I should be glad. But as I am not, I shall turn all my soul to the latter.'

Keats talks only of study and philosophy, he forgets in his modesty the unquenchable source of rejuvenation and joy which exists in his work.

LIFE OF JOHN KEATS

I

It was during the second half of the eighteenth century that a certain Thomas Keats arrived in London.

There exists no document that can tell us whether he came from north, south, east, or west; whether he travelled inside a coach or out; perhaps he even came on foot, his stick in his hand, his knapsack on his back. In all likelihood, he came from the western counties, to try his fortune, as did so many others, in the capital. We know that he was not a person of importance, but he must certainly have been a sturdy countryman, wide awake, able to read and write, and well endowed by nature with plenty of good sense, good temper, and excellent appetite.

We are equally in the dark as to his family, his ambitions, and his capabilities. Was he a mason's apprentice, a carpenter's, a blacksmith's? Agricultural labourer, farm-boy, or shepherd? Perhaps all of them at once. Was he carrying out a plan in leaving his village, or was he simply yielding to a wish for adventure, and the call of the great city? Thomas Keats failed to inform us on these points, and no one else has undertaken to do so.

Indeed, what his life was at that time in London is a complete mystery.

Was it at a moment when disappointment, lack of money, perhaps, caused him to think of returning to his native place, or was it owing to one of those pieces of information which pass from one worker to another when they gather at the inn, that he found himself, one fine day, in front of the livery stables, at the sign of the Swan and Hoop, which stood on Finsbury Pavement, near the vague regions of Lower Moorfields, close to the present-day railway station of Liverpool Street? It was kept by a certain Mr. John Jennings, and whether he needed hands, or whether something about Thomas Keats took his fancy, he engaged him as ostler.

His family consisted of his wife, and a daughter, Frances or Fanny, born in 1775.

Mr. John Jennings was a man of generous spirit, trusting, easily deceived. His business was quite an important one, though not enough so to appear in the official coach-registers of the day. But possibly this might be due to a feeling of independence.

Mrs. Jennings was a competent woman, ceaselessly taken up with the welfare of her family.

The ostler so won upon the good-will of his employer that the latter put no obstacles in the way of his marrying his daughter Frances, who was hardly more than a child when Thomas Keats took up employment at the Swan and Hoop stable.

The marriage took place on October 9th, 1794, not at the Jennings's parish church, but at the more aristocratic St. George's, Hanover Square, which would point to a certain amount of ostentation.

John Jennings handed over his horses and conveyances to his son-in-law, and retired, with his wife, to Ponders End. There he died on May 8th, 1805, leaving a fortune of £13,000. His widow moved to Church Street, Edmonton.

We are unaware of the precise motives which induced John Jennings to set up his employee in such a style. Keats and Jennings are both names which are met with in Cornwall. Sir Sidney Colvin suggests — but it is pure hypothesis on his part — that there may have been some distant family connection between the two men. His researches led to the discovery that this name of Jennings is a very common one round about Falmouth, and that round about 1770 there are records of children born of the marriage of John Jennings and Catherine Keate.

Yet another suggestion — also Sir Sidney Colvin's. Is it altogether impossible that Thomas Keats was that Thomas Keast, born in 1768 in the parish of Saint Agnes, between Newquay and Redruth? — and that this name of Keast was changed to Keats, as Crisp has been changed to Cripps?

Sir Sydney Colvin has also established the fact that about the middle of the eighteenth century there were Keatses in Devonshire, one of whom was headmaster of Blundell's, and, later, Rector of Bideford, while his son, Richard Keats of the *Superb,* was one of Nelson's lieutenants; but there is no connection between these Keatses and those of Finsbury; if there had been, these last, with all their pride of name, would certainly not have failed to mention such ancestors.

There was, however, a sailor in the family — their ma-

ternal uncle Lieutenant Midgley John Jennings. He had served with distinction under Duncan, been present at the battle of Camperdown, and had left a name for courage which was proudly remembered by the young Keatses. He is said to have been so tall that he was the special target of the enemy's fire.

Frances Jennings was lively, and pretty. She loved gaiety, and it is said that some imprudence due to this characteristic was the cause of the fact that her eldest son was a seven months' child. He was born on October 31st, 1795, at Finsbury.

The new-comer was called John, and baptised on December 18th, 1795, at Saint Botolph's Church, of which the rector at that time was Dr. Conybeare.

We shall return to Frances Keats, of whom a melancholy portrait has survived, later. She was at all events a good wife and mother. She and her husband had three sons who survived infancy; the other two were: George, born on February 28th, 1797; and Tom, on November 18th, 1799.

As their affairs were prospering, and their family seemed likely to increase, the young pair left their Finsbury dwelling, where they had had accommodation over or beside the stables and coach-houses, and settled down about half a mile away, in Craven Street, City Road, where were born: in 1801 Edward, who died in infancy; and in 1802 Frances Mary. Keats always calls her Fanny in the exquisite and pathetic letters which he wrote to her, when she was living under the guardianship of Richard Abbey. She was always

the object of his most tender solicitude. Keats was often compelled to resort to the wiles of a lover in order to contrive to meet her, or to send her letters, so strict was the watch kept over her. Fanny Keats married, after her brother's death, a Spaniard, Senor Llanos, and in spite of the appalling hygiene, physical and moral, of her childhood, only died in 1889, in Madrid.

§

" It is a melancholy fact, and one which makes us wonder at the blindness of both families and society in general, that the early years of great men almost always pass unnoticed," says Réné Benjamin in his *Prodigieuse vie d'Honoré de Balzac*. On the other hand, it is precisely this that encourages the growth of legends. An elderly neighbour of the Keats family, Mrs. Grafty, tells how one day she happened to ask George what John was doing, and George replied that John was going to be a poet. She said that even as a tiny child he had the habit of adding a rhyming word to some word spoken, and then bursting out laughing. No doubt the old lady was drawing upon her imagination.

Keats worshipped his mother. He was her favourite. They still tell how once, when Mrs. Frances Keats was ill, and in need of perfect quiet, the boy mounted guard at the door of her room — according to some accounts, with a rusty old sword in his hand — and allowed nobody to pass in to the invalid. The most commonplace children are quite

capable of such a proceeding. Only the idea of arming himself with the old sword speaks a nature out of the common.

Keats calls up his childhood in a little poem which he wrote in 1818 to his sister Fanny, while on his journey to Scotland. In it he depicts himself as a very odd character, delighting to wander about the countryside, and bringing back from these excursions birds which he tamed, tomtits, frogs, and little fishes which he put to swim in the wash-tubs, without heeding the protests of his family, or the cries of the maid, who was in serious danger of finding one or other of these creatures in the food she was cooking.

One pictures to oneself the Keats brothers paying frequent visits to the stables, where they could admire the handsome saddle or carriage horses, the vehicles of every description, the well-polished harness; listen to the post-boys talking and laughing about villages and roads with unfamiliar names, and watch the equipages which were going out dashing off spotless, and those returning after the day's work coming in thick with dust.

At last it was time that the boys went to school. First of all there was some talk of Harrow, but the education there was expensive, and it was patronised by a class of people socially superior to the Keatses. In the end it was decided to send them to John Clarke's school at Enfield. John was sent there first, George later, and finally Tom, who was delicate. It may be said that from the moment of coming under the influences of those who taught in this school, John Keats's star was in the ascendant.

John Clarke's school was a pleasant seventeenth-century house. It had been built by a West India merchant, and stood in a large garden. Part of the façade, built of red brick, and moulded into the forms of flowers, pomegranates, and heads of cherubim, is preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Round about stretched the rich, smiling landscape, typical of the English countryside. Keats could follow the course of a little brook, which flowed into the River Lea, wander about foot-paths, gaze at the cottages, the cornfields and meadows, the ups and downs of Epping Forest, the heights of Highgate, listen to, and learn to tell apart, the songs of the birds. His mind, as he said, filled itself with images. His sensitiveness grew more acute.

John Clarke's pupils were the sons of professional men of moderate income, small merchants, and better-class tradespeople. French was well taught, owing to the number of refugees in England at that time. Keats learnt little Latin and less Greek. He was a medium scholar, noticeable chiefly for his small size, his strength, and his pugnacity. George, sixteen months his junior, was, on the other hand, big for his age, well-balanced, always ready to calm down his elder brother, his love for whom almost amounted to a religion, which was shared by Tom.

Keats was quarrelsome, easily roused, and then ungovernable. One of his fellow pupils, Holmes, calls him ' a creature of passion.' He adds that fighting was ' meat and drink to him.' He fought fairly, courageously, looking his opponent straight in the face, and attacking him violently with his

fists. He was witty, amusing; full of vivacity; a leader amongst his companions. He was remarkable for his personal beauty, and must have been an attractive boy, in the short jacket with mother-of-pearl buttons, usual at that time, and with a large frilled collar, above which rose a head crowned with a mop of red-brown hair, a face whose features must even then have held a kind of fascination. But those who knew him at Enfield only saw in him a soldier, or perhaps a sailor — not the poet to be. How often must he not have entertained his admirers, amongst his schoolfellows, with stories of the prowess of his uncle Jennings, the giant who had dared the Dutch bullets at Camperdown?

After these fits of passion, Keats had nervous reactions; he regretted his hastiness, and made amends, as attractive in his fits of repentance as alarming during his outbursts of fury; and everyone, no doubt, was ready enough to forgive the generous-minded boy.

Indeed, when one thinks it over, Mrs. Grafty, the elderly neighbour of the Keats family in Craven Street, had a good deal of perspicacity.

§

Amongst the masters who taught in his school, John Clarke employed his own son, Charles Cowden Clarke. This latter was eight years older than Keats; he recognised his genius, and sought him out.

Thomas Keats often came to visit his sons at Enfield, sometimes alone, on horseback, sometimes with his wife.

On these occasions he drove a gig, and from all accounts he was a fine-looking man, giving an unusual impression of health and good spirits, when, seated in front, whip and reins in hand, he started his horse off down the road.

On April 15th, 1804, about one o'clock in the morning, as he was going home from a dinner, his horse fell in the City Road, opposite the Methodist Chapel. Thomas Keats fractured his skull on the paving-stones.

The streets of London were badly lighted in those days. Dens swarmed; there were no organised police, but only watchmen. It was one of these who found the injured man, and had him taken to a near-by house, where he died at eight o'clock in the morning, aged thirty-six.

No worse catastrophe could have befallen the family. Mrs. Frances Keats did not display the courage, nor the capability necessary to carry on the livery-stable business by herself. Why could she not have done as did so many others who, in a similar situation, set to work? There were Mrs. Mountain, of Snow Hill, Mrs. Nelson of Aldgate, who carried on similar businesses. But Mrs. Keats gave way; such an effort was not within her powers.

So things went on, one way and another, and presently a fresh complication arose. A year after the death of Thomas Keats, his widow married again, a certain Mr. Rawlings, a clerk, who took over the livery-stable at the Swan and Hoop.

At this time Mr. Jennings, her father, died at Edmonton. He left a fortune of £13,000 which was thus apportioned: to his widow, a capital yielding an income of £200 a year;

to his daughter Frances, now Mrs. Rawlings, another bringing in £50, to revert to her children on the death of their mother; and £1,000 to each of her children, to be held in trust, and not divided until the youngest should come of age.

After these and the other bequests had been settled, there was a sum remaining. Mrs. Rawlings — probably at the suggestion of her mother — instituted a suit against her mother and brother, as executors, in order that the exact disposal of this money should be determined by the Court of Chancery. This disastrous suit, which only ended in 1824, added the horrors of money straits, and indeed of real poverty to the drama which precipitated the death of Keats.

Mrs. Rawlings soon left a husband with whom she was unhappy, and whose character indeed, from what little we know, was base enough, and whose conduct was ambiguous. She took refuge with her mother at Edmonton, where she died of consumption on February 10th, 1810, after the death of her second husband.

Their grandmother, Mrs. Jennings, became the sole prop of the family. But she was seventy-four, she was alone — her husband, her son, her son-in-law, her daughter were all dead; she had four grandchildren. Two of these were in good health: John and George; but two needed great care: Tom and Fanny; and the fact of the disease which had killed their mother increased the anxieties of the good old woman. She sought help in carrying out her difficult responsibility as grandmother from her friend Richard Abbey,

and from Rowland Sandwell, two men in whom she had confidence. Rowland Sandwell soon resigned his charge, and thus Richard Abbey's share of responsibility and authority was doubled. From this time there is no further question, in the life of Keats, of either Rowland Sandwill, or of the stable at the Swan and Hoop.

Richard Abbey! His name has already been mentioned. He was a wholesale merchant, dealing in tea and coffee; his warehouse and counting-house were in London, at 4 Pancras Lane. He it was who left us the melancholy portrait of the poet's mother which has already been referred to. This document was drawn up by Taylor, in the form of a memoir, from a conversation which he had with the Pancras Lane merchant, after the poet's death.

Richard Abbey describes Miss Frances Jennings as a creature of exceptional voracity, and of shocking sensuality; of a temperament so ardent, as he makes out, that it was dangerous to be alone with her. He says that she had a liking for a grocer in Bishopsgate Street, and that she always went to his shop in wet weather, and held her clothes very high when crossing the street, so as to show her legs, which he remarked were very handsome ones. In fact, from his account, she was one of those girls whom it is advisable to marry off young, and who did her best to get married, which, according to Abbey, explains the fact that she had no repugnance to becoming the wife of her father's stable-man. This is a lie, for Thomas Keats at the time of his marriage with his master's daughter was no longer a mere groom, but the trusted head-ostler. Indeed, if one is to believe Abbey,

it was just as well for Mrs. Keats that her first-born did not come into the world until a year after her marriage.

His amiable insinuations are continued by his saying that after Rawlings's death, his widow took to drink, and lived with a Jew named Abraham — which is also a lie, for she is known to have lived, after leaving her second husband, with her mother at Edmonton, where her sons visited her, and their 'Granny Good'; and it is easy to surmise what melancholy holidays the three boys must have spent, in the company of these two women, who, though well enough off as to material circumstances, were broken down by their personal griefs. But in the company of their little sister Fanny they found pleasure.

It is not altogether easy to make up one's mind as to the true character of Richard Abbey — except in so far as what has already been said of him, and what is yet to come suffices as evidence. Mrs. Jennings, as we have seen, had faith in him. Dilke accused him of having mismanaged the affairs of his wards; Taylor speaks of his generosity — but Dickens has taught us under what a mask of goodness the dark soul of a Pecksniff or a Bumble may lie hidden. There is a type of profligacy which contrives to satisfy itself in everyday ways, and never attains to actual vice, through sheer lack of imagination.

We know, in addition, that Mr. Richard Abbey usually wore white cotton stockings, breeches, and half-boots, but that one evening, at the Girdlers' Dinner he caused a sensation by appearing in trousers, for the first time, long after every other man on the Exchange had taken to them.

Lavater's theories were then in popular favour, and Taylor describes Abbey as having 'a great piece of benevolence standing out of the top of his forehead.'

In Taylor's memoir, Thomas Keats fares as badly as his wife. He was, it is true, fond of good living, and there was no reason why he should not have been so. We may picture the Keats home after the manner of one of those pleasant English interiors which Dickens paints for us so vividly. The father, who works hard and in the open air, with his high colour, tells stories of horses, inns, road accidents, of speed records, of journeys in wind, rain, snow, or in brilliant sunshine; of the strangers whom he has driven. The children listen, all ears. The mother busies herself about them; or perhaps, since she is so young, indolent, and coaxing, the others busy themselves about *her*. During the evening, when the neighbours look in, there is hot lemon punch brewed. At Christmas time, the holly and ivy adorn the dining-room, logs burn on the hearth — and it is no casual business to choose and cook aright the turkey and plum-pudding.

Richard Abbey insinuates that Thomas Keats hung about public-houses, affected too fine a horse, went in for continual festivities, at Highgate and elsewhere, and suggests that if he fractured his skull on the City Road paving-stones, it was not because his horse stumbled, but because he was, according to his usual custom, drunk.

Some commentators have suspected — and others have repudiated their suspicions — that Richard Abbey was in love with Mrs. Jennings — of whom, it must be said, he never

fails to speak with respect—and also with her daughter; and they put down these extraordinary calumnies to jealousy. This unsavoury explanation is not impossible, when one considers the dislike which Abbey manifested towards Thomas Keats's sons, with the exception of George, as well as his strictness with regard to Fanny.

On the death of Mrs. Jennings, her grandmother, in December 1814, he took charge of the little girl, which he had the right to do; and kept her rigorously secluded, which he had not.

If there were after all a grain of truth in Abbey's allegations about his mother, had Keats any suspicion of it? Is it conceivable that his first knowledge of the world took the form of an awareness of the frailty of a mother whom he had adored, passionately tended, watched over, amused by reading aloud to her during the illness which reft her from her children, and by which his brother Tom seemed to be already threatened?

Keats hardly ever refers to his childhood. Had he, perhaps, if this were the case, a sacred horror of it? Was it by that amazing mastery of himself, of which he gave proof in every circumstance of his life, that he remained silent, though grief-stricken? He, the man, the poet of such deep sensitiveness that, as Amy Lowell justly writes, he could have touched sorrow with his hands, would never mention the names of his parents except in the intimacy of conversation with his brothers and sister, and, when compelled, during the acrimonious discussions about money with Richard Abbey.

He only once refers to those names in writing, in the postscript to a letter addressed to Fanny Brawne, in these terms:

> 'My seal is mark'd like a family table cloth with my Mother's initial F for Fanny: put between my Father's initials.'

We do not know to what requests these words are the answer. Keats was a collector of seals; and it is possible that, in giving this information to the girl he loved, he was yielding to the pleasure of writing the name which his mother had borne, and which was also that of the two beings he loved most dearly on earth.

II

Richard Abbey's first decision with regard to his wards was to leave them for another year at John Clarke's school.

Keats plunged into his studies with the energy which characterised his least actions.

Orphan as he was, he felt around him cold emptiness; and probably already felt out of sympathy with his guardian. He felt himself the head of the family, with George, Fanny, and the weakly Tom, all depending on him. His good sense and straightforwardness, a heritage from his father, showed him people and things in their true colours. He foresaw a struggle, and prepared himself to meet it, with a courage heightened by a power yet unnamed, which was to declare itself as genius, and which the cruel kindness of sorrow was to call up out of the depths of his soul.

He read without method, greedily, everything that came his way. He read, as he quarrelled, as he fought: because he needs must; indeed, with intoxication. He experienced delightedly, what later he was to experience almost like a madness, when for the first time he opened Chapman's *Homer,* and compared himself, in a superb sonnet to:

'Some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes

He star'd at the Pacific — and all his men
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise —
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.'

Keats *saw* the new lands which his reading revealed to him. His high artistic organisation let him visualise clearly the peculiarities of those who dwelt there, the plants, the animals; he breathed the perfumes, heard sounds and voices. A world was being formed in his mind, which was simply a chaos of sensations and images, brought to life by the budding imagination. He read without ostentation or pedantry, enchanted. He read during his play-time, and at meals.

Charles Cowden Clarke shows him to us, studying Burnet's *History of his Own Time,* sitting back on the form from the table, his head bent, carrying the fork to his mouth from beyond, across the book lying open before him. He must have read at night, for he acknowledges, with all a child's candour, that he was afraid to read Macbeth by himself at two o'clock in the morning. Was this permission to read at table and in bed a special concession to Keats, or did Mr. John Clarke grant it to all his pupils? Happy school, where such liberty is accorded to intelligent studiousness.

This ravenous hunger for reading did not make Keats neglect the rest of his studies. He won four prizes, of which three were books, given for voluntary work, and a silver medal.

Here are the names of the works which were presented to him: an *Introduction to Astronomy, an Ovid,* and a *Diction-*

ary of Merchandise — we must remember that the greater number of John Clarke's pupils were sons of small merchants, and upper-class tradespeople. The pretentious wholesaler of Pancras Lane, for example, would probably not have sent his children there. One of the books refers to: 'John Keats, Emer.'

The medal is inscribed: 'Prize medal. Rev. Wm. Thomas's Academy, Enfield. 1810. Awarded to Master J. Keats.' Mr. Thomas was probably the original proprietor of the school. Round the edge runs 'Audivit Clarkenem.'

§

The year gone by, Richard Abbey decided that for lads of little fortune, like the Keats brothers, it was time to begin thinking about taking an active part in life. They were therefore removed from John Clarke's school.

Richard Abbey arranged a future for Tom and George. He had, in his own office, room for two new clerks — and this no doubt has been credited to his generosity. He brought the two brothers to London.

But what was to be done with John? Here was a changeling creature, whom Mr. Abbey could not understand at all. Business did not interest him, that was clear enough. But the young monster was neither a fool nor a wastrel. Three handsome volumes — of which one was a *Dictionary of Merchandise* — three handsome volumes, and one silver medal bore witness to that. There could be no two minds about it. If Thomas Keats had been living, John would cer-

tainly have been sent to Oxford or Cambridge. But it was too late. John Clarke did not prepare for the universities. Abbey kept the purse-strings, and what profit would it have been to him to loosen them for such a purpose? The grandmother breathed no word. Keats was present, indifferent, at the family council which settled his fate. He had naturalised himself a citizen of quite another world, and the decision of which he was the object mattered little to him.

He was sixteen, and knew, no doubt, that some day he would come into possession of a small sum of money, and then he would be able to play a part in the world.

The decision which was come to in the end was sensible enough. Neither business, nor yet the University; but surgery. In those days that meant rather more than a barber (bleedings, blisters, and so on); and a little less than a physician, which profession involved long and costly studies, preferably at Edinburgh.

John Keats was apprenticed in Edmonton, to Dr. Hammond, who lived, like Mrs. Jennings, in Church Street, and was well-known to her; his house was surrounded by a garden.

Keats signed, according to the custom, an apprenticeship for five years, and a declaration in which he promised not to drink, gamble, or absent himself from his master's house unlawfully — in fact, to maintain an exemplary conduct. There is some question as to the premium paid, but the usual amount for a surgeon's apprentice was £40.

But what a profession! The surgeon's apprentice had to look after the shop; pound powders, concoct unguents and

plasters, measure doses, stick the labels on bottles and boxes; accompany his master, and hold his horse. It was in this occupation that he was once surprised by a boy who had gone to Clarke's school, like himself, though after his time, on a winter's day, his nose red with cold. The boy, who had heard tales of Keats's fighting spirit, attacked him with snow-balls from a safe distance. Keats could not catch him to punish him. This boy was Horne, afterwards the author of *Orion* and editor of Mrs. Browning's letters.

A profession, however, which had its advantages. Charles Cowden Clarke, Keats's former tutor, his intellectual confidant at this time, has told us that the years of the poet's apprenticeship at Edmonton were the 'most placid period of his troubled life.'

There was never anything Bohemian about Keats, either in his bearing, or in his way of thinking or of living. He had been restless, but the hearth, and quiet intimacy, always attracted him. He had a certain amount of leisure at Dr. Hammond's which he did not employ simply in swallowing books wholesale, but in solidly educating himself. He could see his grandmother almost every day, and play with his little sister Fanny. Several times a month he went to London to pay a surprise visit to Tom and George. They were now living in rooms at 4 Pancras Lane, over Abbey's counting-house; Abbey himself was living at Walthamstow. Enfield, too, was not far from Edmonton, and he often walked across the fields to his old school, which held such happy memories for him, and continued his literary education with Charles Cowden Clarke.

Clarke lent him books. Keats had already made his acquaintance with Shakespeare. Clarke introduced him to Spenser. It dazzled him. He went through the *Faerie Queene* 'as a young horse would through a spring meadow — ramping.' The bedazzlement turned to a steady light. Spenser awakened in Keats the need of creation. His first attempts he showed to no one, not even Cowden Clarke. But he submited to him a translation of the *Æneid*. The events, the lines, the words, the epithets, the images which he had particularly noticed struck Clarke. His critical observations, spoken or written, on Virgil, Spenser, Shakespeare, betrayed his intelligence no less than the accuracy of his ear, the acuteness of his observation, and the quickness of his heart in responding. If 'whales lifting the ocean on their backs' delighted him, Posthumus's leave-taking in *Cymbeline* moved him to tears.

When one considers his letters, his scattered articles on theatrical criticism, the attraction which Hazlitt had for him later, whose 'depth of taste' he put, along with Wordsworth's *Excursion* and Haydon's painting, as the 'three things superior in the modern world' it can safely be asserted that in John Keats literature lost not only one of her greatest poets, but also a critic of the first water.

Cowden Clarke lent his friend regularly copies of Leigh Hunt's *Examiner*; Leigh Hunt, with whom his family was friendly. Keats was full of ntaural enthusiasm for the poet-pamphleteer, who, though he had been thrown into prison for the crime of *lèse majesté,* at Horsemonger Lane,

champion of the liberals as he was, was none the less allowed to go on bringing out his review.

In December 1814 Mrs. Jennings died. She had always been the 'Granny Good.' She closed her eyes in anxiety, wondering whether Fanny, legally the ward of Richard Abbey, would be happy at Walthamstow; whether Tom's delicate constitution would stand the climate of London, and office-work. What would become of the children, with their slender fortune? By how much would the legacies of £1,000 each be diminished by the proceedings in the Court of Chancery?

And now John was, in very fact, the head of the family. His feeling of responsibility strengthened in him.

His brothers were in London; his sister at Walthamstow; there was some talk of Cowden Clarke's leaving Enfield to live in London with his brother-in-law, in Warner Street, Clerkenwell. Keats began to think of following his brothers and his former school-master.

§

In 1815, an event took place in London which, although foreseen, and of little importance in the history of the world, was of the first importance in the life of Keats. On February 2nd Leight Hunt was released from prison in Horsemonger Lane.

Keats was coming away from London, when he met Cowden Clarke on his way to the city, to congratulate the

hero of the day. Keats turned back with him, and accompanied him for part of the way; when the moment came to bid him good-bye, after some hesitation, timidly, as though he were performing a blameworthy act, he slipped into his friend's hands the sonnet which he had just written in honour of Hunt's liberation.

Up to that moment Clarke, for all their intimacy, was unaware that Keats wrote. He made no comment on this fact, but took the poem, promising to show it to Leigh Hunt, and Keats went on his way.

Dr Hammond's surgery must have seemed to him that evening the most dreary cavern on this globe — or did he perhaps see it transformed into a chamber of fantasy, filled with marvellous hangings, powders and essences which embalmed the air?

Some weeks later there took place another event, on the eighteenth of June, which changed the history of the world, but which seems to have disturbed Keats not at all: Waterloo.

Four years later, in 1819, Keats felt the reaction indirectly, but with what force! the counter-blow of the fall of Napoleon, hailed, almost before the news was spread, by Shelley, in a sonnet. The victory had loosed the military legions upon Europe. Women were eager to offer relaxation to the warriors. Vanquished in France, victors amongst the Allies, they enjoyed the same prestige. Dances, dinners, receptions followed one another in their honour, and their successes caused Keats, then desperately in love with Fanny Brawne, the anguish of tragic jealousy.

But for the moment Waterloo was a small enough affair

for Keats, compared with the bold stroke he had just made, and successfully carried through, of coming out as a poet on so auspicious an occasion as Hunt's release from prison.

Life at Edmonton, for the reasons given above, was now intolerable to him. He chafed, grew exasperated. His pugnacious disposition, roused by the anxiety he felt about the fate of his family, by his secret ambitions, by the intense brain-work to which he gave himself up, took the upper hand. He went so far, as he himself tells us, as to raise his hand against Dr. Hammond; which was going far, but is not incredible, when one remembers the boy who armed himself with a rusty sword to guard his sick mother's room.

However it happened, with the common consent of his master and his guardian, Keats in September 1815 broke his five years' engagement, and took, in his turn, the road for London, in order to continue his medical studies, no longer as surgeon-apprentice, but as a medical student, attached to a hospital. Thus he gave Mr. Abbey the impression that he had no intention of cutting himself off completely from the life mapped out for him. This was true enough, but he probably did not mention to his guardian the fact that in his baggage, along with his medical text-books, he had packed up a number of poems.

III

On his arrival in London, at the end of September, Keats found his brothers installed in Pancras Lane, in rooms over Richard Abbey's counting-house; and his sister Fanny also provided for with a lodging by Abbey, but in his own house at Walthamstow; and about the same time Clarke moved to London too.

Keats found lodgings for himself at 8 Dean Street, Borough, a quarter which he described as 'a beastly place in dirt, turnings, and windings.' He acclimatised himself with difficulty. London was a dreary city, and hostile to poetry. He pined after the country, the open air. He felt terribly lonely. And it seemed to him that he had nothing to say: he felt dry and empty. But nothing could really discourage him; the demon which had taken possession of him extended his sway over the being of the poet; it would not be long before he reigned there as sole monarch.

On October 1st he was entered at Guy's Hospital, which in those days was united with St. Thomas's, as a student for six months. Four weeks later he became a dresser. On March 3rd, 1816, his engagement was renewed for twelve months, under 'Mr. L.' (Mr. Lucas.)

Mr. Lucas was an ungainly man; with stooping shoulders, awkward, deaf, 'not overburdened with brains,' and a very poor surgeon.

However, Keats attended lectures by the brilliant surgeon

and anatomist, Astley Cooper, at the time at the height of his fame both as a lecturer and acting surgeon. He was a very fine man, with an inexhaustible energy, a tireless worker, universally looked up to. Perhaps it was of him that Keats was thinking, when he counted amongst those who are benefactors of humanity those who have the gift of spreading pleasure and joy about them.

Keats handled the lancet well; he was acute in matters of diagnosis; but, alas, all the use his science was to him was to leave him without illusions, either on the subject of his own health, or Tom's.

Astley Cooper, realising, no doubt, that this particular student was an exceptional being, commended him to the care of his namesake, George Cooper, who was one of his dressers. Cooper advised Keats to leave his solitary lodging in Dean Street, and join him in his own, which he shared with two other medical students, Stephens and Mackereth. They had rooms over the shop of a tallow chandler in St. Thomas's Street, and all four, knowing nothing of what destiny might have in store for them, divided their time between the hospital, study, and amusement.

Stephens also loved literature. He even wrote verses himself, and showed them to Keats, who had a poor opinion of them, and said so. Stephens was mortified, but unresentful. They discussed the famous poets; Keats dismissed Pope, then in much regard, as a mere versifier. Stephens admired Keats, in spite of calling him, with the rest, 'Little Keats.' And as a matter of fact, the poet was never more than five feet high.

I would interpolate here, and beg my readers never to forget, this pregnant sentence of Mr. Middleton Murry's: 'Had Keats been six inches taller, the history of English literature in the nineteenth century might have been different.'

In the common sitting-room, there was a seat in the window which was always known as 'Keats's place.' There he would sit and dream, when the conversation did not interest him. When he sat reading, he always had one leg crossed over the knee of the other, one hand smoothing his instep, while his other hand supported the book.

Keats, as Stephens tells us, was chiefly remarkable for the love he bore his brothers, who, on their part, seemed to regard him as a kind of Phœnix. He would walk and talk 'as one of the Gods might be supposed to do, when mingling with mortals.' It is the same comparison that is made by all who knew him; and this disdainful air of his sometimes exposed him to ridicule.

On the paper cover of his syllabus of chemical lectures, Stephens discovered one day the following lines, scribbled by Keats:

'Give me women, wine, and snuff
Until I cry out, "hold! enough."
You may do so, sans objection,
Until the day of resurrection.'

Keats, apart from his serious literary studies, which he pursued more and more ardently, led much the same life as his fellow-students, who were, we must remember, medical

students, and whose jokes and amusements would not have quite the same flavour as those of students of law, science, literature, or theology.

He has been described as a ' regular fellow,' a good companion. He did not smoke, as did the Prince Regent, who was solemnly warned by Astley Cooper as to the probable consequences of his cigar-smoking; nor like Byron, who is said to have smoked to preserve the whiteness of his teeth; like his friends, Keats took snuff. He could celebrate with liveliness in verse the potency of wine, but he was very far indeed from being a slave to it, like the delightful Lamb. He played cards, but was no gambler.

He had a great love for the theatre; serious drama, comedy, and he went once or twice to the pantomime. His usual place was in the gallery, whether on account of its cheapness, or because he preferred it. He was also fond of watching a boxing match. And he once went to a bear-baiting, and imitated afterwards with marvellous exactness the antics of the bear—its wagging head, its dabbing fore-paws.

Yes, he was a perfectly normal being, attracted by all that was healthy, beautiful and vigorous. He wrote once:

> ' Though a quarrel in the Streets is a thing to be hated, the energies displayed in it are fine; the commonest Man shows a grace in his quarrel.'

We know little of any affairs with women; at this time, indeed, his attitude towards them is probably summed up in a poem with no title:

'Woman! when I behold thee flippant, vain,
Inconstant, childish, proud, and full of fancies;
Without that modest softening that enhances
The downcast eye, repentant of the pain
That its mild light creates to heal again:
E'en then, elate, my spirit leaps and prances,
E'en then my soul with exultation dances
For that to love, so long, I've dormant lain:
But when I see thee meek, and kind, and tender,
Heavens! how desperately do I adore
Thy winning graces — to be thy defender
I hotly burn — to be a Calidore —
A very Red Cross Knight — a stout Leander —
Might I be loved by thee like those of yore.'

In fact, he had never known love, though he dreamed of it. But there was in his life, just as there was in Baudelaire's, a Passer-by.

He met, in Vauxhall Gardens, a lady with whom he did not exchange word nor sign, but the remembrance of whom haunted him for a long while after. He wrote to her a sonnet, in the spring of 1818, in which he says that five years have passed since he saw her; the meeting therefore must have taken place about 1813 or 14. Sir Sidney Colvin concludes that it was to her that Keats addressed the lines:

'Fill for me a brimming bowl
And let me in it drown my soul:
But put therein some drug, designed
To Banish Women from my mind:

For I want not the stream inspiring
That fills the mind with — fond desiring,
But I want as deep a draught
As e'er from Lethe's wave was quaff'd;
From my despairing heart to charm
The image of the fairest form
That e'er my reveling eyes beheld,
That e'er my wandering fancy spell'd.
In vain! away I cannot chase
The melting softness of that face,
. . . My sight will never more be blest;
For all I see has lost its zest. . . .'

Four years later, in 1818, in one of those moments which come to poets, prophetic glimpses of their ultimate fate, Keats, looking back over his life, shadowed by the foreboding that he would die before he had accomplished his work, cried:

'And when I feel, fair creature of an hour,
That I shall never look upon thee more,
Never have relish in the faery power
Of unreflecting love; — then on the shore
Of the wide world I stand alone and think
Till love and fame to nothingness do sink.'

Baudelaire writes of his Passer-by:

'Fugitive beauty
Whose sudden discovery woke me to life anew,
Am I never to see thee again, save in eternity?

Elsewhere, far off from here; in years to come; may be never;
For I know not whither thou fleest, thou knowest not whither I go,
O thou, whom I might have loved, who knewest that I might have loved thee?'

We shall have occasion again to couple the names of Keats and Baudelaire.

A question has been raised as to whether Keats was unduly inclined to drink. The person responsible for this suggestion, in the first place, was Haydon, the painter. The story he told is that Keats 'once covered his tongue and throat as far as he could reach with Cayenne pepper, in order to appreciate the "delicious coldness of claret in all its glory."' This is, however, hardly evidence of what he habitually did; and it is quite clear from the few references to such matters in his letters that with regard to this, as in most other directions, he acted in the way conformable with the habits of his age and society, doing nothing to excess, nor making himself conspicuous by unusual abstinence.

The death of Keats, like that of Leopardi, is amongst the most noble and pathetic that I know. We can afford to neglect those of such guests as have sat down to the banquet of life with the appetites of ogres joined to weak digestions. But few poets have made their entry into the literary world so surrounded with sympathy and appreciation as the author of *Sleep and Poetry*. He compared himself later, when the acclamation had subsided a little, to 'a pet lamb in a sentimental farce.'

But during the years 1816 and 1817 he was full of happiness and hope. 'A painter or a sculptor might have taken him for a study after the Greek masters, and given him "a station like the herald Mercury, new-nighted on some heaven-kissing hill,"' writes George Felton Matthew, a placid youth, slightly melancholy, loving peace, respecter of institutions, who had come to know him through Tom and George, and who became, in spite of the differences in their characters, his close friend. G. F. Matthew adds to his sketch of Keats this touch: 'He used to spend many evenings in reading to me, but I never observed the tears in his eyes nor the broken voice which are indications of extreme sensibility.' This is rather different from the impression given us by Cowden Clarke. But he was pointing out to us the kind of reading which moved Keats to tears; G. F. Matthew is not. Being by no means sensitive himself, he was probably insensitive enough to what moved others. And perhaps, too, Keats, exact artist that he was — exact to such a point that, for all the luxuriance of his thought, the Parnassians, severe judges as they were of English lyric at the beginning of the nineteenth century, none the less accounted him worthy — was little moved by an art of which he had himself mastered the mechanism, and was only conquered when he felt in a work that 'eternal principle of beauty' which he sought, at this time still, in ornaments of style. He admired Spenser. He studied his effects, the differences between his resonances and Shakespeare's. He found himself before the mystery of the soul.

G. F. Matthew adds: 'The eye of Keats was more critical

than tender.' Severn, the painter, spoke of: 'the wine-like lustre of his eyes.' And Haydon, also a painter, said: 'Keats was the only man I ever met with who seemed and looked conscious of a high calling, except Wordsworth.'

Keats's physical beauty, like that of his work, only increased as he grew older. On the day when his fatal disease struck him down he laid down his pen, having written his most perfect poem; a poem containing his most lovely lines, his most personal ones, lines indeed written under inspiration which lights up the mind of the writer and the heart of the man. Having written those lines, Keats disappears; regards himself as dead, since he refers to his subsequent existence as 'posthumous,' that existence during which he saw no one except his doctor, and Severn. There was little failing, either physical or intellectual. Keats had blazed into light; he was consumed by that blaze: a lightning flash which left no ashes.

IV

In London, Tom and George had found friends. Foremost, with the family of a deceased naval officer: the Wylies. There were sons, and a daughter Georgiana, who was only eleven when George first met her. However, he fell in love with her early, and in course of time they became engaged. Keats wrote to this young girl the sonnet which begins:

'Nymph of the downward smile and sidelong glance,
In what diviner moments of the day
Art thou most lovely? when gone far astray
Into the labyrinths of sweet utterance,
Or when serenely wand'ring in a trance
Of sober thought? — or when starting away
With careless robe to meet the morning ray
Thou spar'st the flowers in thy mazy dance. . . .'

When Georgiana became the sister-in-law, he felt for this 'glorious human creature' a passionate feeling of brotherly affection, near neighbour of love. It was at the Wylies that Keats met the Matthews, whose cousin, G. F. Matthew, mentioned in the last chapter, became his friend. There also he met wise Haslam, nick-named 'The Oak,' and through this last, Severn. Both were fated to have some influence in the poet's destiny. There were also two Matthew girls:

Caroline and Anna, silly little creatures, who, when questioned later about their acquaintance with Keats, simply replied that he 'had a very beautiful countenance and was very warm and enthusiastic in his character. He wrote a great deal of poetry at our house. . . .'

§

Charles Cowden Clarke had kept his promise. He had shown Hunt the sonnet written by Keats on the day of his release. Hunt was by no means indifferent to this expression of admiration. Clarke was, indeed, better than his word, for he showed Hunt, then living in the Vale of Health at Hampstead, some of Keats's poems. Hunt kept the sonnet on *Solitude,* which he printed on May 5th, 1816, after having asked Clarke to bring the young poet to see him. In Amy Lowell's *Life* there is a facsimile of the page on which these first lines of Keats's appeared (p. 282). There are two columns containing an assortment of unrelated and unimportant pieces of news; and at the bottom of the second, the two quatrains and the two tercets simply signed J. K.

It needed no more to extinguish in Keats his last spark of enthusiasm for a surgeon's career. However, he had just renewed his engagement at Guy's for a year, and would gain, with his diploma, the right to practise.

It was at the end of May or the beginning of June that Keats was introduced to Hunt. As the two friends neared Hampstead, Keats's step slackened; but his heart was beat-

ing furiously. For Hunt really was a great man; a passing glory, no doubt, but unmistakably a glory, and an influence.

In July, 1816, Keats was examined by Everard Brande, one of the Court of Examiners of the Society of Apothecaries, for his final diploma. His fellow-students, to whom for some time he had appeared to be simply an idler, writing verses in season and out of season, were surprised to find that he passed successfully.

The examination over, he was free to take a holiday, and he spent it at Margate.

At Margate he worked at his poetry. It is probable that the poem, *I stood tiptoe upon a little hill,* which was a kind of sketch for his Endymion, was begun earlier in the summer of this year, and that he went over it during this time. In it were released the crowding images in the poet's soul. The familiar countryside that he had known in his childhood and youth form the setting of it. Keats himself is in it. He looked upon Nature, and felt

> 'As light and free
> As though the fanning wings of Mercury
> Had play'd upon my heels.'

It is a story of a summer's day in the English country. The moon already reigns sovereign. He sees

> 'In the calm grandeur of a sober line
> The waving of the mountain pine.'

and

'Sweet-peas, on tiptoe for a flight
With wings of gentle flush o'er delicate white.'

Wings! a favorite word, that, of Keats's. In his epistle to Charles Cowden Clarke, also written at Margate, he tells his mentor all that he owes him. Clarke revealed to him

'the sweets of song . . .
What swell'd with pathos, and what right divine:
Spenserian vowels that elope with ease,
And float along like birds o'er summer seas.'

Hugo saw 'the blue strophe float across the starry lutes.' And what a marvellous gift for thinking in images, for breathing life into things!

'Who read for me the sonnet swelling loudly
Up to its climax and then dying proudly?
Who found for me the grandeur of the ode
Growing, like Atlas, stronger from its load?
Show'd me that epic was of all the king,
Round, vast, and spanning all like Saturn's ring?'

In the autumn Keats returned to London. He left his lodging in St. Thomas's Street, and his companions Cooper, Mackereth and Stephens, and went to live with his brothers, in Cheapside, in rooms over a passage leading to the Queen's Arms Tavern. He probably still saw something of his former friends, for he no doubt continued his medical studies for a while longer, although he felt less and less inclined for a career as surgeon. Stephens copied out the whole of his

forthcoming book of poems, and it is to him that we owe the two pieces of verse 'Give me women, wine, and snuff,' and 'Before he went to feed with owls and bats.'

The three brothers were together now. Keats enjoyed the quiet evenings which they passed together, when

'Small, busy flames play through the fresh laid coals,
And their faint cracklings o'er our silence creep
Like whispers of the household gods that keep
A gentle empire o'er fraternal souls.'

He had grown used to London. His stay in the capital had done him good; none of the aspects of the town escaped him. But whenever he could, he went off into the country.

'To one who has been long in city pent,
'Tis very sweet to look into the fair
And open face of heaven — to breathe a prayer
Full in the smile of the blue firmament.'

And he was reading now, writers of his own day as well as ancients. His critical faculty was wide awake. Did he admire Scott's novels? At all events he speaks of 'three literary kings in our time — Scott — Byron — and then the Scotch novels.' And on his table lay Coleridge's *Christabel,* Shelley's *Alastor,* Reynolds's *Naiad.*

In October he attained his majority. He could no longer exist without poetry — 'eternal poetry.' The demon had full possession of him now. He might be studying medicine, but

his thoughts were elsewhere. To Cowden Clarke, in illustration of his unsuitability for the profession, he said on one occasion:

> 'The other day, for instance, during the lecture, there came a sunbeam into the room, and with it a whole troop of creatures floating in the ray; and I was off with them to Oberon and fairy-land.'

At last, one day, he had to open a man's temporal artery. The sense of his responsibility seized him, and, in his own phrase 'on reflecting what had passed through my mind at the time, my dexterity seemed a miracle, and I never took up the lancet again.' This was the death-blow. He gave up a career in which he might have excelled. His engagement at the hospital would not end until March. He proposed to break it, just as he had done in the case of Hammond. And at the same time George had a difference with Abbey's junior partner, Hodgkinson, and left his employment with the firm.

The Keats brothers did not trouble themselves about Abbey; for them he was only connected with their money affairs. He on his part disapproved of their influence over Fanny. The bringing up of this child he regarded as a tiresome duty; he had no affection for any of them.

Abbey advised John to set up as a surgeon at Tottenham. He had been obliged, in order to meet the expenses of Keats's training, to encroach on the capital held in trust for him; and he was anxious to see Keats reaping some tangible fruit of that training. But Keats's thoughts were elsewhere. He

had just been made free of a new and marvellous world: Charles Cowden Clarke had lent him Chapman's translation of Homer. The copy — the folio edition of 1616 — had been lent to Clarke by a Mr. Alsager, who managed the money-market department in *The Times*. Up to then Keats had known Homer only through Pope's translation.

Keats and Clarke were intoxicated by Chapman. The latter has told us which were the passages that specially struck his former pupil: the conversation of Helen with the aged senators on Troy Wall; the account of Diomed's shield and helmet.

The two of them sat over the book until dawn. And during the following morning, Clarke received the famous sonnet *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer*.

If Keats had had any doubts as to his poetic vocation, Chapman would have put an end to them.

But it was long since Keats had had any such doubts.

Clarke showed the poem to Hunt, who read it, along with other poems of Keats's, to Hazlitt. And he quoted it, in the course of an article which appeared in the *Examiner* on December 1st, entitled *Young Poets*, in praise of Shelley, Reynolds, and Keats. For Keats, who had not yet published his first book of poems, this was a kind of consecration.

As has been told, Keats had made Hunt's acquaintance at the end of May, through Clarke's introduction; now, on his return from Margate, in October, he became an intimate of Hunt's. Between the two writers a lightning friendship sprang up.

Leigh Hunt's was a curious personality. What trace will

he leave on the history of English literature? It is impossible to say. Perhaps an extinct volcano. But his documentary importance is certain enough. Who reads to-day, who will ever re-read, *Rimini* or *Foliage* for the beauties which these works contain? He was an inspirer of others.

Physically, to judge from his portraits, Leigh Hunt was tall and slim; his face gives an impression of cleverness, intelligence, and, not to beat about the bush, something uncertain, elusive, which must have been a real charm. His conversation—'champagne,' said Hazlitt, in his essay on the notable talkers of his time. 'The dream companion for the fire-side,' said Lamb. Both at once, we may imagine. But he was also a discoverer of men, as his article on Shelley, Keats, and Reynolds proves.

V

The intimacy between Hunt and Keats was strengthened still more when the latter, his instruments slipped into their cases, and his text-books placed on his book-shelves, was free to live as he pleased; and his life passed pleasantly between London and the Vale of Health.

In London his life was no longer that of a student, but that of a young poet, sure of himself, surrounded by congenial companions, and for whom it was now a question of finding a publisher.

Hunt had recently brought out his *Story of Rimini,* a long narrative poem. His style is fluid enough, cloyed with honeyed epithets; a weight of detail drags the flow of the story to little purpose. The chapters are hardly differentiated. As in the *Feast of the Poets* there was a preface explaining his intentions in writing the poem. This preface, with the discussion which it called forth, brought Hunt, once more the man of letters, new admirers and new detractors. He repeated there, however, what he had said already, that poetry is above all things an art; that imagination is the touch-stone of the poet; that Pope was no poet; that music and strength must mark the language employed; that for the English poet Shakespeare must be his first and chief guide; and that Lear's cry, 'I am a very foolish, fond old man,' can teach us all that poetry has to teach.

On these subjects Keats and Hunt talked by the hour together. They neglected none of the pleasures of the imagination. They exhausted all: those which are called up by the poets and heroes of ancient times, the sound of the summer rain against the windows, the crackling of the coals on the winter hearth. Sometimes the two writers sat down together at the table, and wrote verses on some given theme. On one of these occasions they crowned each other with laurel wreaths, in imitation of the bards of the ancient world. Some friends of Hunt's happened to come in and surprised them in this guise; Hunt immediately tore off his crown; but Keats was in a wild mood, and persisted in wearing his throughout the visit. Keats improvised two sonnets in honour of this occasion.

These sonnets are of no importance, but occasionally the improvisations turned out well; Keats's sonnet on the *Grasshopper and the Cricket,* beginning 'The poetry of earth is never dead,' was written on one such occasion; and on another, rather later, when Shelley had dropped in, the poets were set by Hunt to produce sonnets on the subject of the Nile. Shelley's effort was poor enough, and Keats's not particularly good; but Hunt wrote one of his best short poems, with an often quoted line:

'It flows through old hush'd Egypt and its sands,
Like some grave mighty thought, threading a dream.'

Keats at this time was very much under the influence of Hunt; an influence which Hunt owed as much to his wit as to the variety of knowledge he displayed—rather super-

ficial knowledge, to say truth — and to his charm of manner, his attractive voice, and his love of beauty, and affection for his friends. He completed Keats's education.

When the conversation lasted on into the night, Keats used to sleep at Hampstead. They made up a bed for him on chairs, in the studio which was furnished with low bookcases, on which stood busts of poets and soldiers. On the walls hung engravings and pictures.

Sometimes he went back to London across the fields:

'Keen, fitful gusts are whisp'ring here and there
Among the bushes half leafless and dry;
The stars look very cold about the sky,
And I have many miles on foot to fare.'

However, he troubled himself neither about the cold, nor the icy wind, nor the rustling of the dead leaves, nor the long distance that lay between him and his night's rest. His thoughts were with Milton, with Laura, with Petrarch. Poems sang in his head. Visions surrounded him; he asked for 'a golden pen,' that he might

'write down a line of glorious tone,
And full of many wonders of the spheres.'

His companions on these walks were sometimes his newly made friends, Robert Haydon and John Hamilton Reynolds. The latter, a year younger than Keats, had already published by 1816 three volumes: *Safie, An Ode,* and a volume of poems, *The Naiad*. He was the son of the mathematical master at Christ's Hospital, and had been educated

at St. Paul's School. He was, at the time of Keats's making his acquaintance at Leigh Hunt's, a clerk in an insurance company. His family lived at 19 Lamb's Conduit Street, Little Britain. The Reynolds girls, Jane, Mary, and Charlotte, who played the piano exceedingly well, treated Keats as a brother.

Reynolds introduced him to James Rice, a very attractive person, of sound judgment and pleasant social qualities. He was not strong, and often fell ill, but always recovered, 'coming on his legs like a cat,' said Keats.

Keats was also friendly with a school-fellow of Tom's, Charles Wells. To excuse himself for some cause of offence which he had given Keats, Wells had once, as a schoolboy, sent him a bunch of roses, an offering which called forth a sonnet by way of thanks. Wells, who was later to have a certain literary fame was given to practical jokes; and one of these of which the dying Tom was the victim was a tragic affair to which we shall have reason to refer later.

In November 1816 Clarke had presented Keats to the 'glorious' Haydon. On November 20th, after a meeting between them — possibly this first one — Keats sent Haydon a note and a sonnet. Haydon thanked him, and promised to show the poem to Wordsworth, who with himself and Leigh Hunt is included in it as one of the 'great spirits' who 'now on earth are sojourning.'

'The idea of your sending it to Wordsworth,' wrote Keats, 'put me out of breath.'

The sympathetic feeling between the painter and the young poet was sudden and intense. Their intimacy increased

to such a point that Haydon declared that if he managed to sell the great picture at which he was working, *Christ's entry into Jerusalem,* Keats should never lack anything. Keats, on his side, as has been mentioned, thought that Haydon's painting — and on this point he was in agreement with many, and those not the least dependable, of his generation — together with Wordsworth's Excursion and Hazlitt's 'depth of taste' were the 'three things to rejoice at in this age.'

The canvas progressed slowly. Haydon had ruined his eyesight by over-study in his youth, and was obliged to take long periods of rest.

Born in 1786, he was the son of a bookseller in Plymouth. His heroes were Leonardo da Vinci and Michael Angelo, and he longed to become, like them, a great painter. Great painting for him meant historical painting.

After leaving school, he spent a short time in business, and then gave up everything else in order to devote himself, in spite of his poor eyesight, to painting. He worked feverishly, copying and recopying Raphael's cartoons. He bought casts and models. His studio in Great Marlborough Street was lumbered up with sketches, studies, heads, masks, anatomical casts; it was in fact 'a chaos of which he was God.'

He was deeply interested in anatomy. He evolved grandiloquent theories as to the connection between the structure of the human form, the poem, the symphony, and painting. He was convinced that he had a mission to fulfil. He had most inflated ideas about himself. He wrote as much as he painted. He kept a journal which contains portraits worthy

of a Carlyle. Some critics have held that his true weapon was not the brush but the pen. Haydon's journal is of interest, in the first place as documentary evidence of an epoch, secondly as documentary evidence of one of the most extraordinary characters imaginable. He was proud, vain, violent, hard-working, and conscientious in the extreme. He thought that one of his canvases was badly hung at the Academy; he seized on this ground of offence, working himself up into a fury, and launched an attack on officialdom. His pen was mordant; he made enemies of those who might have been of service to him, but did not let the fact trouble him. He was pious, something of a mystic, and never settled down to work without prayer. All the happenings of his life, good or bad, seemed to him to be directed from above. He mixed up God with his affairs; he also mixed up men. He was in want of money; he borrowed, but was never in a position to repay. He sought and found protectors. He allowed others to support him without any sense of shame; indeed, with the idea that he was merely an instrument in the hands of the Eternal, he stuck at nothing in order to accomplish his appointed task, and it was useless to expect him to behave in accordance with ordinary standards of morality in such matters. He was so little concerned with the financial question, and steered his boat so badly that, in 1846, overwhelmed with debts, this stalwart Christian cut his throat, and then, as death delayed, blew out his brains.

His friend Wilkie took him to see the Parthenon marbles which Lord Elgin had brought back from Greece; Haydon thenceforward spent his time with them. He copied the

Parthenon friezes as he had copied the cartoons of Michael Angelo and Raphael. He discovered, and revealed to all lovers of art, a new beauty. He had only one object in life; to get the Government to buy these marbles. Such riches must not be allowed to leave the shores of England. He settled down to the campaign, spared neither time nor money, whether his own or other people's. It was a thankless task, but he refused to let himself be discouraged. In writing, by word of mouth — for he was eloquent enough — he overcame the difficulties one by one. This battle for the Elgin marbles was the great adventure of his life. The marbles were finally placed in the British Museum in 1817. Meanwhile, he had been displaying them to his friends — and to Keats amongst them, of course.

Haydon's drawings lack soul and suppleness. He saw nothing beyond lines, attitudes, groupings. Keats, with his exquisite sense of beauty, his rare artistic organization went further. It was the whole life of a race that revealed itself to him in the Greek marbles, as well as the 'eternal principle of beauty' which he sought in everything. The two sonnets which the Elgin marbles inspired in Keats are not descriptive only. They have a depth of thought, just as the *Ode on a Grecian Urn* has a depth of thought, a profound, humane philosophy, to which the pictures are accessory.

Keats's soul and mind were roused by the sorrow which he felt at his mother's death. Spenser, Milton, Shakespeare, Chapman, roused his creative power. Sculpture and music set the finishing touch to the work. He was often at Reynolds's, hearing Charlotte play. He completed the literary

education of Joseph Severn who, painter and musician, initiated him on his side into the secrets of Haydn and Mozart, of Poussin, of Claude Gelée. If he was not asked to Lamb's evenings, where whist, tobacco, punch, and puns were the order of the day, Keats was present at those gatherings at the Reynolds's when Charlotte played. Keats sat listening, inclined towards the instrument.

VI

DECEMBER 1816 was a time of happiness for Keats. His brother George was now formally engaged to Georgiana Wylie, and this prospect of a home to be was sweet to the poet's heart. Hunt's article had stimulated him to fresh endeavours. He had finished *Sleep and Poetry*, his first long poem, which might be considered his confession of faith, the lyric preface to all his work.

The opening of the poem is soft and musical, and calls to mind one of Haydn's tender and gracious andantes. The poet asks himself:

> 'What is more gentle than a wind in summer?
> What is more soothing than the pretty hummer
> That stays one moment in an open flower,
> And buzzes cheerily from bower to bower?
> What is more tranquil than a musk-rose blowing,
> In a green island, far from all men's knowing?
> More healthful than the leafiness of dales?
> More secret than a nest of nightingales?
> More full of visions than a high romance?
> What, but thee, Sleep?'

How many times did he not sing of sleep? In the lovely sonnet, 'O soft embalmer of the still midnight'; in *En-*

dymion; in *Isabella* he analysed the sensations of insomnia with a vividness which caught Browning's notice:

'But what is higher beyond thought than thee?
Fresher than berries of a mountain tree?
More strange, more beautiful, more smooth, more regal,
Than wings of swans, than doves, than dim-seen eagle?'

And the answer is, Poetry.

'No one who once the glorious sun has seen,
And all the clouds, and felt his bosom clean
For his great Maker's presence, but must know
What 'tis I mean, and feel his being glow.'

Keats does not write of what the poet sees as part of his heritage. For his part he is as yet but a humble subject of the Kingdom of Poetry, in honour of which he has taken up his pen. He asks himself whether he possesses the means to bring to actual existence that Work which he knows to be within him — the means, and also the time, for

'life is but a day,
A fragile dew-drop on its perilous way
From a tree's summit; a poor Indian's sleep
While his boat hastens to the monstrous steep
Of Montmorenci. Why so sad a moan?
Life is the rose's hope while yet unblown;
The reading of an ever-changing tale;
The light uplifting of a maiden's veil;

A pigeon tumbling in clear summer air;
A laughing schoolboy, without grief or care,
Riding the springy branches of an elm.'

Keats asked only for ten years of life, in order to complete the task which he had set himself. Alas! Before him lay only four years more of life. Three years of work at poetry, one year of 'posthumous life.' Did he feel it already? Whilst he waited, as Baudelaire said of Champfleury, he placed in nature 'a faith without bounds.' He entered her most hidden secrets, tasted her deepest joys. 'Could he ever bid these joys farewell?' He resigned himself to the thought.

'Yes, I must pass them for a nobler life,
Where I may find the agonies, the strife
Of human hearts; for lo! I see afar,
O'ersailing the blue cragginess, a car
And steeds with creamy manes — the charioteer
Looks out upon the winds with glorious fear.
. . . The charioteer with wondrous gesture talks
To the trees and mountains and there soon appear
Shapes of delight, of mystery, and fear
Passing along before a dusky space
Made by some mighty oaks: as they would chase
Some ever-fleeting music on they sweep.
Lo! how they murmur, laugh and smile and weep:
Some with upholden hand and mouth severe;
Some with their faces muffled to the ear
Between their arms; some clear in youthful bloom,
Go glad and smilingly athwart the gloom;

Some looking back, and some with upward gaze;
Yes, thousands in a thousand different ways
Flit onward. . . .'

The driver of the mysterious chariot seems to listen, he notes what is said by those mighty voices. Then the vision fades, and the sense of real things streams into the poet's soul. He thinks then what poetry was in the days when she was nourished by the forces of nature, and by human truth, and what alas, she has become, since, by the domination of a certain 'Boileau' and those who

'sway'd about upon a rocking-horse,
And thought it Pegasus.'

With Hunt's own arguments — which had also been those of Wordsworth and Coleridge — he attacks the school of Pope — a thing for which Byron could not pardon him, nor yet the critics of the *Edinburgh Review* and the *Quarterly*. He gives throughout admirable definitions of poetry, which his intellectual, artistic, and moral development gradually heighten into something finer still.

'A drainless shower
Of light is poesy; 'tis the supreme of power;
'Tis might half-slumbering on its own right arm.'

That last is a visual image as exact and strong as those he used earlier to describe the ode, the sonnet, and the epic poem. But poetry is also

'a friend
To soothe the cares, and lift the thoughts of man.'

Later he said it was a holy warmth. And all this for him was clear

'As anything most true; as that the year
Is made of the four seasons — manifest
As a large cross, some old cathedral's crest,
Lifted to the white clouds.'

Therefore he strove to breathe new life into his art, that he might become one of those

'poet kings
Who simply tell the most heart-easing things.'

And anew he cries:

'O may these joys be ripe before I die.'

Sleep and Poetry in the variety of its composition is a kind of symphony or æsthetic sonata. There are movements in it of allegro, andante, scherzo. The poem written under the combined sign of Art and Friendship, was conceived, perhaps sketched out, at Hunt's, in the studio littered with books and engravings and busts in which Keats passed the night when he grew belated and slept at Hampstead.

The critics of the time regarded it as the finest of the 1817 *Poems;* it was hardly that. If it has been studied here in detail, it is because, as has been said above, it may be regarded as the preface to Keats's work as a whole, the

first proof that this true poet, this fine artist, was in no sense a 'mere dreamer'; that, from the first, he never held the theory of 'art for art's sake'; his ambitions were higher than that. He wrote 'a thing of Beauty is a joy for ever,' because for him Beauty was no mere ornament, but the fundamental law of life.

§

The collection of poems was ready for the printer. There is amongst them one sonnet which is interesting from the autobiographical point of view, in which there is a hint of Keats's feeling that his small stature barred him from being loved as he wished to be loved:

'Had I a man's fair form, then might my sighs
Be echoed swiftly through that ivory shell
Thine ear, and find thy gentle heart; so well
Would passion arm me for the enterprise:
But ah! I am no knight whose foeman dies;
No cuirass glistens on my bosom's swell;
I am no happy shepherd of the dell
Whose lips have trembled with a maiden's eyes. . . .'

Who was the woman who called forth from Keats this avowal, so strange on the part of him who kept for himself alone those rending cries that his passion for Fanny Brawne caused him to utter? Had he no other means than this infantile, romantic stratagem, by which to approach an unresponsive heart?

Publishers were found, probably through the instrumentality of Hunt: James and Charles Ollier. The first was the business man; the second, the literary partner. The two brothers founded a publishing house; they were daring; they 'discovered' young and unknown writers whom they 'pushed' and encouraged — and were prepared to drop if unsuccessful. They gambled on their authors just as the owners of a racing stable bet on their colts.

In 1816 things were particularly propitious for this kind of literary gambling. Everybody read; men of the world, and business men. They even studied the poets. People made fortunes out of poetry. Byron filled Murray's coffers, as well as his own pockets.

Keats, his hospital expenses paid, had enough to live on for two years. But what had he to fear? His family, his friends, his publishers, all upheld him in the belief that he was on the way to be a great poet.

Let him take his chance!

The pugnacious schoolboy, at the modest school at Enfield, the simple surgeon apprentice of Edmonton, who had reached London two years before, as little known as his father Thomas Keats had been before him, had become a member of the circle of the choicest spirits of his age.

§

Whilst Keats was correcting his proofs in January 1816, Hunt called together at his dinner-table, together with other guests, Horace Smith, Haydon, and the three poets

in whose future he had expressed his faith: Reynolds, Keats, and Shelley. The two latter met on this occasion for the first time. It was a stormy evening. Shelley, at close quarters, made an attack on Christianity. Haydon, in the rôle of believer, was roused to fury. He stood up to Shelley ' like a stag at bay.' The painter, squat, grandiloquent, fanatical, no doubt with little enough wit. The poet, darting, airy. Hazlitt's account of him was that

> ' He has a fire in his eye, a fever in his blood, a maggot in his brain, a hectic flutter in his speech. . . . He is sanguine-complexioned, and shrill-voiced. . . . His bending, flexible form appears to take no strong hold of things, does not grapple with the world about him, but flows from it like a river.'

However, his manner of arguing had plenty of solidity behind it. He had long browsed on philosophies and had thoroughly assimilated them in theory. He was clever. He made his effect. His voice, Lamb complained, was the most intolerable rattle imaginable. But Lamb was always inclined to be unjust to Shelley. The only poem of his that he would allow was *Rosalind and Helen,* a long and monotonous modern eclogue, which even in the judgment of his most fervent admirers is quite second-rate.

Hunt, also agnostic, but with an agnosticism of the amiable, superficial kind that is the faith of a man of the world, tried in vain to calm the contestants. The one, like a trapped creature, defended himself as might some lumbering animal. The other darted backwards and forwards, as lithe

as a snake. Did not his friends nickname Shelley the 'Serpent'?

Keats took no part in the discussion, but withdrew himself, disgusted, equable-natured as he was, by the intemperate language both of the believer and the atheist. His slight knowledge of philosophic systems in any case prevented him from interfering in the arguments and the divagations of the two unchained fighters.

Shelley manifested a frank and real sympathy for Keats. Keats did not respond to his advances. Their characters were too different, as were their situations in life; they almost belonged to different factions. Shelley enjoyed a kind of pseudo celebrity in which scandal, a thing Keats abhorred, went for a good deal. Let us return to the childhood of the two poets. Keats at school was far from unhappy. He found in Clarke a master who recognised his genius, and worked for him heart and soul. If Keats was a fighter, it was only with his fists, like a man. Shelley was utterly miserable. His companions disliked him; they hunted him about; he defended himself as best he could, biting and scratching. The kind of fight a girl would put up. His expulsion from Oxford after the publication of *The Necessity of Atheism* had made some sensation. His marriage with Harriet Westbrook had been a romantic dream of love. The unfortunate woman's suicide had ended that adventure. For all his hatred of Christianity he had gone to Ireland with Mary Godwin, his second wife, and had, out of sheer generosity and hatred of tyrrany, taken the part of the Irish Catholics, and had had printed at his own expense,

and published at his own risk, inflammatory pamphlets. He was the author of *Queen Mab* and *Alastor* and was living the life of a hermit at Marlowe, working at *Laon and Cythna,* a revolutionary epic of which he talked incessantly. Perhaps he was wrong to advise Keats, as yet unpublished, not to be in a hurry to submit his youthful compositions to the eye of the public in general and the critics in particular — though he certainly did it without any ulterior motive. Shelley of course came of an aristocratic line. He knew that he would one day inherit his father's title and imposing fortune, and he already placed the latter at the disposal of such of his friends as were in straitened circumstances — Hunt and Godwin, to mention only two — and this too out of quite disinterested generosity. Keats was poor, and his origin humble enough. Shelley into the bargain had been to Oxford, and Keats, except for his medical knowledge, was unlearned, and had to consult Bailey about the spelling and accentuation of the Greek and Latin words in his poems. Shelley subordinated poetry to the moral and political sciences. Keats subordinated everything to poetry. He liked good food; Shelley lived, sparsely, on raisins, dried figs and bread, and, as he wrote to Maria Gisborne, in his house no one ate meat nor drank wine, but they were happy none the less. These small details have a good deal of importance. In short, when Shelley asked Keats to Marlowe, where Hunt had already been a guest, Keats, proud of his independence, refused, and during such intercourse as followed, he did not cast aside his reserve.

§

The volume, dedicated to Leigh Hunt, was in circulation on March 3rd, 1817. Keats himself carried a copy to his friend, whom he met between Hampstead and Highgate, walking along Mill Lane, the walk where more than one poet was accustomed to go; Coleridge, living near by at Dr. Gillman's, amongst them.

Keats's friends were all enthusiasm. They could not bring themselves to doubt success. The publisher, Charles Ollier, suddenly visited with inspiration, wrote a sonnet in honour of his poet on the fly-leaf of his own copy. In it he praises his

> 'upward darting Soul,
> His eager grasp at immortality.'

He soon stopped his singing. The sale was practically nothing. The critics, for the moment, ignored it. The book fell flat. Clarke was disconcerted. 'The book might have emerged in Timbuctoo,' he writes, 'with far stronger chance of fame and approbation.'

One person read it, however, and that was Richard Abbey. He read it because it was by Keats, otherwise the tea and coffee merchant would never have 'troubled his head with any such thing.' He met Keats and said:

> 'Well, John, I have read your book, and it reminds me of the Quaker's horse, which was hard to catch, and good for nothing when caught. So your book is hard to understand and good for nothing when it is understood.'

If appearances are to be believed, his ward never forgave him for this opinion, although, considering the kind of man the wholesaler was, it was honest enough.

Keats was not discouraged. Reverses steel the nerves of men. He led a festive life, going to card-parties, spending evenings in excited talk, that kept him sleepless, before settling down to work afresh.

Haydon, to whom he had already spoken of working on *Endymion,* was troubled. He feared that his friend was in danger of being deserted by that divine spirit which he felt around himself after he had prayed and meditated. He took Keats to the British Museum, where the Elgin Marbles were now installed. They were shown there to much better effect than had been the case in Lord Elgin's temporary shelter.

Haydon regarded Keats as his spiritual son. He feared Hunt's evil influence, and tried to thwart its effects. Well-read, and really gifted with a critical sense by which his contemporaries, painters and writers alike, set store, he realised the semi-ignorance of Keats; he believed in his genius, but his way of talking he thought lacked consistency.

Keats had no love either for drawing-rooms, or studios, nor for populous well-lighted taverns. He had no love for what Hunt called joco-serio-musico-pictorio-poetical amusements. Keats was himself only in the midst of nature. He discovered and analysed her complex harmonies, called forth and questioned the divine things hidden there. He watched the currents of winds flowing out of the blue depths of heaven, swaying the trees as the tide sways the sea-weed, and

in that breeze he recognised all the scents of all the seasons, and sang it in his poems.

Haydon lent him Goldsmith's *History of Greece*. This book strengthened and explained for Keats the effect made by the Parthenon marbles. It told him to leave the world, and everything in it, and to go alone where he would have leisure to look into his own heart, and to see what he could find there. It was wise advice.

§

But Keats had new champions: J. Ritchie, a young surgeon; Woodhouse who wrote a sonnet, as Ollier had done, on the strength of his book; and Benjamin Bailey, a friend of Reynolds who became a close friend of Keats. He was studying theology at Oxford. These friends made some amends for the dreariness which his lack of success made for the poet.

The Ollier brothers were bitterly disappointed. They regretted having engaged, in spite of themselves, in a disastrous speculation. They reproached Keats for having done nothing favourable for his book, nay, for having done the opposite, and placed it under the patronage of Leigh Hunt, who was in such disfavour with the all-powerful conservatives.

The Olliers did not reflect that they had insisted on an immediate publication; that they had been as enthusiastic as anyone about its probable success. Keats, on his side, thought the Olliers had not done their part as publishers with suf-

ficient thoroughness, and complained that they had lost all interest in the book as fast as they had taken it up.

In the end George intervened, not very tactfully, and Keats's relations with the Olliers came to an abrupt end. The difference was settled in the way in which such differences between authors and publishers, mutually dissatisfied, usually are settled — Keats changed his publisher.

Reynolds, who had done the same thing the year before, introduced Keats to his own publishers, Messrs. Taylor and Hessey. They were Hazlitt's publishers, and were well thought of.

Taylor was a business-like man, methodical in his handling of affairs. He was not without learning. He originated the theory that Sir Philip Francis was the author of the *Letters of Junius*. He had a hobby, therefore, and every man who has a hobby is in some way accessible. He succumbed to the charm of Keats, to whom, with the ink on the agreement to publish his poems scarcely dry, he made an advance of twenty pounds — on the strength of a poem of which not a line had yet been written.

We do not know a great deal about Hessey. He managed the retail department of the firm, but had very little to do with Keats. Reynolds described him as 'a very respectable man.' Keats nicknamed him 'Mistessey,' which gives the impression that he had some liking for him.

Taylor and Hessey had a reader, Richard Woodhouse. He was devoted to literature, and had a great admiration for Keats's writing; he collected and copied out everything of the poet's that came his way: poems, improvisations,

writings of all kinds. It was largely due to this activity of his that so much has survived.

Woodhouse in his enthusiasm managed to persuade his partners that the Olliers had mismanaged things, and that they ought to take up the poet.

Thus freed from anxiety, Keats followed Haydon's advice, to retreat and ponder.

'My brothers,' he wrote to Reynolds, 'are anxious that

> I should go by myself into the country — they have always been extremely fond of me, and now that Haydon has pointed out how necessary it is that I should be alone to improve myself, they give up the temporary pleasure of living with me continually for a great good which I hope will follow. So I shall soon be out of town. You must soon bring all your present troubles to a close, and so must I, but we must, like the Fox, prepare for a fresh swarm of flies. Banish money — Banish sofas — Banish Wine — Banish Music; but right Jack Health, honest Jack Health, true Jack Health — Banish Health and banish all the world.'

It is evident that he was, indeed, in need of rest. On April 9th, he went to Hunt's, no doubt to bid him good-bye; but Hunt's power to encourage and stimulate him seemed to be waning. On April 14th he booked a seat on the Lymington and Poole Mail, which left the Bull and Crown at Holborn at half-past seven in the evening. His destination was Southampton, for the Isle of Wright.

VII

As he went on his journey, he must have been thinking of his brothers who were in the midst of moving house, leaving their London lodgings for 1 Well Walk, Hampstead; he himself was thus spared that upheaval.

He was much preoccupied about his brothers at this time. Tom's health was growing increasingly delicate, and George was for the moment out of employment. There was some vague talk of his seeking his fortune in America, and a Mr. Wilkinson is mentioned, who was evidently concerned in some new scheme for his making a living. Keats asked to be kept informed about this.

The Keats brothers were not rich, but John was full of hope.

He did not sleep. The country through which the coach was passing was new to him. Somewhere about three o'clock in the morning it must have actually passed the cottage at Chawton where Mrs. Austen and her daughters Jane and Cassandra were living at that time.

'As the lamplight crept along the following things were discovered — "long heath broom furze" — Hurdles here and there half a Mile — Park palings when the Windows of a House were always discovered by reflection — One Nymph of Fountain — *N. B. Stone* — lopped Trees — Cow ruminating — ditto Donkey — Man and

Woman going gingerly along — William seeing his Sisters over the Heath — John waiting with a Lanthorn for his Mistress — Barber's Pole — Doctor's Shop — However, after having my fill of these I popped my Head out just as it began to Dawn — *N.B. This Tuesday Morn saw the Sun rise.*'

Keats took the boat for Cowes from Southampton — a distance of 16 miles. From Cowes to Newport he was struck by the number of hospitals and barracks — particularly the barracks. These buildings filled him with disgust ' with the Government, for placing such a Nest of Debauchery in so beautiful a place.' A man whom he questioned in the coach on this subject assured him that it had quite spoiled the people of that part. ' In the room where I slept at Newport, I found this on the Window — " O Isle spoilt by the mil*a*tary! " ' But on the other hand he unearthed a head of Shakespeare, a portrait which he not seen hitherto, and, which charmed him. In the end his landlady made him a present of it.

After Spenser, Homer, and the Greek marbles, he now made the discovery of the sea. He gazed at it, he listened to it. What a mystery!

' Oh ye! who have your eye-balls vex'd and tir'd
Feast them upon the wideness of the Sea;
Oh ye! whose ears are dinn'd with uproar rude,
Or fed too much with cloying melody —
Sit ye near some old Cavern's Mouth, and brood
Until ye start, as if the sea-nymphs quir'd! '

The composition of these lines did him good, for he had not written now for some time, and he felt that the habit of poetry had made him ' a Leviathan.' Where should he settle down to satisfy this hunger? The Isle of Wight enchanted him; it was the Isle of primroses. Living was dear at Newport and at Shanklin. He decided finally on Carisbrooke, about a mile from Newport, renting a room at a Mrs. Cooke's. It was not too expensive and

> 'from here I can see your continent — from a little hill close by, the whole Angle of the Isle of Wight, with the water between us.'

His exile weighed on him; reading was not enough. He craved for the warm atmosphere of his dear ones, without whose company he pined, for the stimulating talk of Clarke, Reynolds, Hunt, Haydon. He longed for news of them all. And all the time he was studying Shakespeare eagerly. He wrote to Reynolds:

> 'I'll tell you what — on the 23rd was Shakespeare born. Now if I should receive a letter from you and another from my Brothers on that day 'twould be a parlous good thing. Whenever you write say a word or two on some Passage in Shakespeare that may have come rather new to you, which must be continually happening.'

He finally went on to Margate, where Tom joined him. He did not like its treelessness. Still, this lack was no surprise to him; had he not, the year before, spent his holidays at Margate? But those holidays had been holidays from study

for a medical student. Now, Keats expected from nature deeper emotions, and from himself quite other labours.

Endymion was now begun; and, as he acknowledged to Hunt,

> 'I have asked myself so often why I should be a poet more than other men, seeing how great a thing it is — how great things are to be gained by it, what a thing to be in the mouth of Fame — that at last the idea has grown so monstrously beyond my seeming power of attainment, that the other day I nearly consented with myself to drop into a Phæthon.'

But he drove this thought out of his head.

The same day he wrote to Haydon:

> 'There is no greater Sin after the seven deadly than to flatter oneself into an idea of being a great Poet . . . how comfortable a feel it is to feel that such a Crime must bring its heavy Penalty?'

About the same time he wrote to Taylor and Hessey asking them for an advance; they sent him twenty pounds. Keats thanked them for their 'liberality in the shape of manufactured rag' by means of which he would 'immediately proceed to destroy some of the minor heads of that hydra the dun.' After a kind of prose poem about these monsters, Keats confesses to his publishers that instead of poetry he has

> 'a swimming in my head and feel all the effects of a Mental debauch, lowness of Spirits, anxiety to go on with-

out the power to do so.' And he adds, 'This evening I go to Canterbury, having got tired of Margate. . . . At Canterbury I hope the remembrance of Chaucer will set me forward like a Billiard Ball.'

Tom and George returned to Hampstead; John continued to wander. He went to stay near Hastings, at the small fishing village of Bo Peep, which to-day has disappeared before the spread of houses, and has become a part of St. Leonards.

While he was at Hastings, chance sent a charming woman to cross his path. He was not content to exchange with her only an unforgettable glance, as with the lady at Vauxhall. He kissed her. Was that the whole of the adventure? That we do not know. But this unknown woman to whom he always referred as 'the lady I met at Hastings' reappeared later in his life.

He was spending too much, and the money which Hessey and Taylor had sent him, and which was the best part of his resources, was exhausted. He had to appeal once more to his publishers. 'I must endeavor to lose my maidenhead with respect to money Matters as soon as possible,' he wrote; and he borrowed thirty pounds from them.

Thus furnished with money he was able to rejoin his brothers in their lodging at Well Walk. The landlord was a man called Bentley, a postman, and the father of a large family. Keats was not particularly fond of children — any more than Lamb, who, nevertheless, wrote with the collabor-

ation of his sister Mary the most charming stories taken from Shakespeare's plays.

The 'horrid row' which Mr. Bentley's children made inconvenienced Keats and Tom, whose health was becoming more and more unsatisfactory. Keats had no illusions about it; the consumption which had carried off his mother would carry Tom off sooner or later. Tom was reduced to leading the life of an invalid, unable to work.

Keats, at Hampstead, was in close relations with the Dilkes, and with Charles Brown, friends of Hunt's. Dilke and Brown, who had been schoolfellows, shared a house in John Street; it was called Wentworth Place.

Dilke was twenty-eight years old. He came of an aristocratic family, and was by profession a clerk in the Navy Pay Office. He was a lover of books, and a collector of Blake. Keats himself does not seem to have taken much interest in the great visionary artist and poet, since he never mentions him in his letters. Dilke was learned, and had edited, as a continuation of Dodsley's work, a series of old plays. In politics he was a radical. His wife was a charming woman; she had a real affection for Keats — whom Brown and the Dilkes had met, the winter before — and this friendliness increased as time went on. In short, a charming circle, except for the young Charles Dilke, a noisy, self-willed boy, spoilt by his indulgent father.

Brown was a bachelor. At the time that Keats met him, he was leading the life of an amateur of letters; he was something of an artist, and was the author of the libretto of an opera, *Narensky,* which was played with some success at

Drury Lane. He was possessed of enough to live on, but he had not come by an independence easily; life had treated him roughly.

He was born in 1786 at Lambeth. When he was eighteen he had gone into partnership with his elder brother who was a 'Russia merchant.' He was sent to St. Petersburg to look after the firm's interests there. But misfortunes overtook the firm, ending in bankruptcy. Brown was cast on the streets without a penny in his pockets. He was in such straits that he had to live on one meal a day, which he took in an eating-house where the knives and forks were chained to the table. Another of his brothers rescued him from this state of affairs. He was in the service of the East India Company, and made Charles his agent in London.

Brown was a typical 'good fellow,' sturdy, fond of good food and good wine, very appreciative of poetry. He was bald, had weak eyesight; in fact looked like Julius Cæsar in spectacles. In 1829 he wrote a life of Keats which was refused by all the publishers, and of which he offered the manuscript to the first editor — commentator — biographer, of Keats: Lord Houghton.

Surrounded by his new friends and by his brothers, in a neighbourhood full of pleasant memories, Keats worked feverishly. He did not go to see Hunt, who was now living in Paddington, and made no attempt to meet him. It was the same story with Haydon who, in a bad financial position, and equally bad sentimental one, had moved to Lisson Grove, near Hunt, with his casts and his models, his *Entry of Christ into Jerusalem* into which, amongst the multitude who

hailed the Saviour, he introduced likenesses of Wordsworth, Voltaire, and Keats.

Tom and George were talking of making a trip to Paris; Shelley invited John to stay with him at Great Marlowe. Keats, without any other motives than those before mentioned, again refused this invitation — and on September 3rd Benjamin Bailey carried him off to Oxford.

It was vacation time; the university town was very quiet. The poet was working regularly and calmly, setting himself a daily task to accomplish.

Bailey had a very salutary effect on his guest, both moral and physical. They wrote and read at the same table, discussed their work together; and, always talking and discussing art, the common things of life, and philosophy — a new kingdom of which Bailey unlocked the gates for Keats — the two young men roamed the countryside, boated on the Isis, 'skimmed into Beds of rushes,' wandered about the town, without doubt

> 'the finest city in the world — it is full of old Gothic buildings — Spires — Towers — Quadrangles — Cloisters — Groves, etc., and is surrounded with more clear streams than ever I saw together.'

Keats gave Reynolds's sisters a humorous account of this city, which was doubtless the finest in the world:

> 'Plenty of water, thank heaven — Plenty of Books, thank the Muses — Plenty of snuff, thank Sir Walter Raleigh — Plenty of segars, — Ditto — Plenty of flat country, thank

Tellus's rolling-pin. I'm on the sofa — Buonaparte is on the snuff-box — But you are by the seaside — argal, you bathe — you walk — you say 'how beautiful' — find out resemblances between waves and camels — rocks and dancing masters — fire-shovels and telescopes — Dolphins and Madonnas.'

Benjamin Bailey was a candidate for Holy Orders, which did not prevent him from falling in love very easily — for the moment with Marianne Reynolds, and later with Miss Gleig; Keats, later on, was scandalised by the lack of constancy displayed by the parson-to-be. If the latter indulged in sentimental confidences, Keats talked to him about his own money-troubles, about Tom's health, about George's undecided future, and about his little sister Fanny, whom he was only allowed to see in Mr. Abbey's presence.

He wrote at this time an exquisite letter to the child. And it would seem that, in order to correspond with her, he was obliged to resort to a strategem; he did not send his letter to Abbey's house, who would no doubt have read it first, but care of Miss Kaley, Fanny's schoolmistress. That has its own pathos.

'We have been so little together,' he writes, 'since you have been able to reflect on things, that I know not whether you prefer the History of King Pepin to Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* — or Cinderella and her glass slipper to *Moore's Almanack*. However, in a few letters I hope I shall be able to come at that and adapt my scribblings to your pleasure. You must tell me about all you read if it be only six

Pages in a Week and this transmitted to me every now and then will procure you full sheets of Writing from me pretty frequently. — This I feel as a necessity for we ought to become intimately acquainted, in order that I may not only, as you grow up love you as my only Sister, but confide in you as my dearest friend.

He describes to her the subject of his new poem.

'Perhaps you might like to know what I am writing about. I will tell you. Many Years ago there was a young handsome Shepherd who fed his flocks on a Mountain's Side called Latmus — he was a very contemplative sort of a Person and lived solitary among the trees and Plains little thinking that such a beautiful Creature as the Moon was growing mad in love with him. — However, so it was; and when he was asleep on the Grass she used to come down from heaven and admire him excessively for a long time; and at last could not refrain from carrying him away in her arms to the top of that high mountain Latmus while he was a-dreaming — but I daresay you have read this and all the other beautiful Tales which have come down from the ancient times of that beautiful Greece. If you have not let me know and I will tell you more at large of others quite as delightful.'

He gives news of George and Tom:

'Like most Englishmen they feel a mighty preference for everything English — the French Meadows, the trees, the People, the Towns, the Churches, the Books, the every-

thing — although they may be in themselves good: yet when put in comparison with our green island they all vanish like Swallows in October.'

He speaks severely of the French language and literature, placing it far below Italian — influenced in this no doubt by Hunt and Brown. And finally he adjures Fanny:

'You will preserve all my letters and I will secure yours — and thus in the course of time we shall each of us have a good bundle — which, hereafter, when things may have strangely altered and God knows what happened, we may read over together and look with pleasure on times past — that now are to come.'

The sap was overflowing in him; the sympathy pouring in on every side caused him to expand. His high spirits carried him away.

'Give my sincerest respects to Mrs. Dilke,' he writes, '. . . and tell her that had I remained at Hampstead I would have made precious havoc with her house and furniture — drawn a great harrow over her garden — poisoned Boxer — eaten her clothes-pegs — fried her cabbages — fricaseed (how is it spelt?) her radishes — ragout'd her Onions — belaboured her *beat*-root — outstripped her scarlet runners — parlez-vous'd with her french-beans — devoured her mignon or mignonette — metamorphosed her bell-handles — splintered her looking-glasses — bullocked at her cups and saucers — agonised her decanters — put old Philips to pickle in the brine-tub

— dis*organ*ised her piano — dislocated her candle-sticks — emptied her wine-bins in a fit of despair — turned out her maid to grass — and astonished Brown; whose letter to her on these events I would rather see than the original copy of the Book of Genesis.'

He thanked Jane and Marianne for having introduced so precious a friend as Bailey to him, and he charged his *Endymion* himself to make his excuses for the absurdities which he was uttering.

'My dear ladies,' Endymion should say, "favourites of my gentle mistress, however my friend Keats may have teased and vexed you, believe me he loves you not the less — for instance, I am deep in his favour, and yet he has been hauling me through the earth and sea with unrelenting perseverance. . . .'

Keats had met a Hydra to cut off whose heads the cheques which he had received from Taylor and Hessey had been of assistance. He was now meeting another kind of demon which filled him with equal horror: literary women. He draws an amusing caricature of these demons who

'having taken a snack or luncheon of Literary scraps, set themselves up for towers of Babel in languages, Sapphos in Poetry, Euclids in Geometry, and everything in nothing.'

But Keats was over-driven. He feared the nervous depression which had attacked him in the spring, at Margate.

He recommended to Haydon a young painter friend of

Bailey's called Cripps. Haydon promised to do something for the youth. He did not in the end do anything. This failure to keep his word bitterly offended Keats.

He paid a visit of a few days to Stratford-on-Avon, in Bailey's company — Shakespeare, like Chaucer, inspired him to work. When he returned in October to Well Walk, after his Oxford sojourn, the three first books of *Endymion* were finished.

VIII

KEATS had certainly read, at this time, the various published criticisms of his book. A note in the *Monthly Review* of April compared him to the Elizabethans — a suggestion which would be far from displeasing to him.

The *Eclectic Review* of October said that it was unfortunate

> 'that a young man of vivid imagination and fine talents should have fallen into so bad hands as to have been flattered into the resolution to publish verses, of which a few years hence he will be glad to escape from the remembrance.'

The 'bad hands' is, of course, a reference to Hunt.

The *Scots and Edinburgh Magazine* of October found the lines:

> '. . . The moon lifting her silver rim
> Above a cloud, and with a gradual swim
> Coming into the blue with all her light.'

'A glorious and Virgilian conception.' But the reviewer finishes his article with an attack on Hazlitt, and a recommendation to Keats to 'cast off the uncleanness' of the school of Hunt.

Hunt himself finally gave his opinion. He wrote three articles on Keats's poems, which appeared in *The Examiner* (June 1st, July 6th, July 15th). What was the reason of this delay?

Keats had not written to Hunt during his stay in the Isle of Wight, or from Margate or Oxford. He did not consult him about *Endymion* while it was in process of being written. Did Hunt resent his silence, and his new friendship with Bailey?

His articles were flattering. He cautioned Keats against excess of detail, and carelessness with regard to form — was he not there his own judge? The best poem in the volume, according to him, was *Sleep and Poetry*.

What did all this matter to Keats? He was sure of himself, but there was, on the other hand, something of which he was by no means sure: the durability and steadfastness of human attachments.

From Hampstead, he gave Bailey an account of their general relations. Discord reigned. Hunt and Haydon were neighbours now, at Paddington, and their discussions often became bitter enough.

Hunt 'criticised mercilessly' every head in Haydon's picture, which progressed very slowly. The two men had known each other for many years and they were 'pour ainsi dire, jealous neighbours.'

Everybody seemed to be at daggers drawn. They made complaints about each other; and there is nothing more venomous than great men when they act in such a way.

Keats felt disgusted with men of letters; except for Words-

worth he felt he did not want to meet any of them, not even Byron.

Haydon advised him not to show his poems, under any pretext, to Hunt 'or he will have done half for you.' Keats, writing to Bailey, tells him how Haydon reports that

> 'When he (Hunt) met Reynolds in the theatre, John told him that I was getting on to the completion of 4,000 lines — Ah! says Hunt, had it not been for me they would have been 7,000. If he will say this to Reynolds, what would he to other people?'

The literary world has altered little since then!

However it might be, Hunt tried to prevent Keats from writing a long-winded work. To what purpose? Keats wrote to Bailey the reply he could hardly make to Hunt:

> 'Do not the Lovers of Poetry like to have a little Region to wander in, where they may pick and choose and in which the images are so numerous that many are forgotten and found new in a second Reading: which may be food for a Week's stroll in the Summer! Do they not like this better than what they can read through before Mrs. Williams comes down stairs? A Morning work at most.
>
> 'Besides, a long poem is a test of invention, which I take to be the Polar star of Poetry, as Fancy is the Sails — and Imagination the rudder.'

And, alluding to an Ode to Apollo, written jokingly at Hunt's, he adds:

'I put on no Laurels till I shall have finished *Endymion,* and I hope Apollo is not angered at my having made Mockery at him at Hunt's.'

Keats shrugged his shoulders with a certain disdain. In order to retain his independence he had refused two invitations from Shelley, and here he was threatened with being regarded as a pupil of Hunt's!

Keats was not in very good health at this time; in the same letter to Bailey he writes:

'The little Mercury I have taken has corrected the poison and improved my health — though I feel from my employment that I shall never be again secure in Robustness.'

However, several weeks later he writes to Bailey again:

'I think Jane or Marianne has a better opinion of me than I deserve; for, really and truly, I do not think my Brother's illness connected with mine — you know more of the real cause than they do; nor have I any chance of being rack'd as you have been.'

This letter was written after there had been some talk of their going to Lisbon together.

Tom's illness was phthisis, and up to this time there is no evidence that Keats had any reason to imagine himself infected by the disease which had struck down his mother, one of his brothers, and which subsequently attacked two of the children of his brother George.

At all events, Keats had occasion to be careful of his health; and was above all careful not to go out at night, especially in damp weather, if he was not feeling well.

The Edinburgh Magazine announced a series of articles launched against 'The Cockney School of Poetry.'

In the first of these articles Keats read his own name, written in capitals, beside Hunt's, both of them attacked with a virulence of which we should have no conception to-day. Hunt's name was dragged in the mud; not only his work was attacked, but his private life. He was accused of every kind of moral depravity. Neither his appearance, his conversation, his ways, nor his friends were spared. This outburst was signed 'Z.' Hunt, in an advertisement in *The Examiner,* invited the anonymous writer to reveal himself.

Keats's pugnacious spirit was roused. He awaited his turn, and hoped to meet the calumniator either in the street or in the theatre.

Would not his best reply to these attacks be his *Endymion*? He went away for a week or two, alone, in order to finish his poem, to Burford Bridge, to the little inn situated at the foot of Box Hill. The river Mole flows through this calm and lovely countryside, so much admired of tourists, where, during the French Revolution Madame de Stael, Narbonne, Talleyrand and others had taken refuge. It was at that very inn at Burford Bridge that Nelson had spent a night on his way to Portsmouth, before embarking for Trafalgar.

In this solitude, Keats regained possession of himself. He asked himself what was the cause of the vain strife and agitations to which men yielded.

Haydon had not kept faith with him over the matter of Cripps. This troubled him, but he was able to understand Haydon's behaviour. He wrote to Bailey on this subject:

'As soon as I had known Haydon three days, I had got enough of his character not to have been surprised at such a Letter as he has hurt you with.'

He delves into that mound of greatness and littleness which makes man, into that antagonism between the heart and the mind which makes the poet's personality — a problem which troubled him for a long time. But has a poet personality? Is he not all things at one and the same time? Is he not the voice of the universe? Men of action, they alone, have personality. But poets! They are all things.

'The Setting Sun will always set me to rights, or if a Sparrow come before my Window, I take part in its existence and pick about the gravel.'

Only the happiness of the moment is sure.

'I am certain of nothing,' he writes to Bailey, 'but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination. What the Imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth — whether it existed before or not — for I have the same idea of all our passions as of Love: they are all, in their sublime, creative of essential Beauty. In a Word, you may know my favourite speculation by my first Book, and the little Song I sent in my last, which is a representation from the fancy of the probable mode of operating in

these Matters. The Imagination may be compared to Adam's dream — he awoke and found it truth: I am more zealous in this affair because I have never yet been able to perceive how anything can be known for truth by consecutive reasoning — and yet it must be. Can it be that even the greatest Philosopher ever arrived at his Goal without putting aside numerous objections? However it may be, O for a life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts! It is " a vision in the form of Youth," a shadow of reality to come — And this consideration has further convinced me — for it has come as auxiliary to another favourite speculation of mine — that we shall enjoy ourselves hereafter by having what we called happiness on Earth repeated in a finer tone — and yet such a fate can only befall those who delight in Sensation, rather than hunger as you do after Truth. Adam's dream will do here, and seems to be a Conviction that Imagination and its empyreal reflection, is the same as human life and its spiritual repetition. But, as I was saying, the Simple imaginative Mind may have its rewards in the repetition of its own silent Working coming continually on the Spirit with a fine Suddenness — to compare great things with small, have you never by being surprised with an old Melody, in a delicious place by a delicious voice, *felt* over again your very speculations and surmises at the time it first operated on your soul? — do you not remember forming to your self that Singer's face — more beautiful than it was possible, and yet with the elevation of the Moment you did not think so? "

All the time that he was working at *Endymion,* Keats was reading Shakespeare's sonnets. He shared with Reynolds his discoveries of beauty, new or remembered.

On Friday, November 28th, *Endymion* was finished.

The task finished, his mind free once more, he stayed in the country for a week or so, then he rejoined his brothers, who were just about to set off for Teignmouth, and a milder climate. Tom had been spitting blood.

Keats divided his time between London and Well Walk; he led a restless life; and copied out his poem.

He once again entered into relations with his friends and companions. He went to see his sister Fanny. Writing to his brothers he tells a little anecdote of her.

> 'I think she will be quick. Mrs. Abbey was saying that the Keatses were ever indolent, that they would ever be so, and that it is born in them. Well, whispered Fanny to me, if it is born with us, how can we help it?'

§

Reynolds was dramatic critic on the staff of the *Champion*; being forced to be away from London at this time, he asked Keats to act as his substitute; the latter now wrote the first prose article which appeared from his pen. The subject was well within his powers: Kean as Richard III. He wrote:

> 'The sensual life of verse springs warm from the lips of Kean, and to one learned in Shakespeare hieroglyphics —

learned in the spiritual portion of those lines to which Kean adds a sensual grandeur; his tongue must seem to have robbed the Hybla bees and left them honeyless.'

Later he wrote a review on Kean in an adaptation of the three King Henry plays, which ended by being an essay rather than a dramatic criticism. Shakespeare, for him, expresses the poetry of his soul in Romeo, Hamlet, Macbeth; Lear and Othello the human passions; in Richard III, John, and the Henries it is

'the blending of the imaginative with the historical: it is poetry! — but often times poetry wandering on the London Road.'

Keats spent a good deal of time at the Dilkes'; and he went to see West's picture *Death on the Pale Horse.*

'It is a wonderful picture, when West's age is considered; but there is nothing to be intense upon, no women one feels mad to kiss, no face swelling into reality. The excellence of every art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth.'

Keats no longer allowed himself to be swayed by Nature; he immersed himself in it; he no longer walked amongst men like a young god, but like a fellow-man.

He was wearied by the affectations of most men of letters. They seemed to him to be mannered in their way of talking,

of eating, and drinking, 'in their mere handling of a Decanter.'

> 'They talked of Kean and his low company — would I were with that company instead of yours, said I to myself!'

Shelley had published his *Revolt of Islam.*

> 'Poor Shelley!' comments Keats, 'I think he has his Quota of good qualities, in sooth la!'

He saw a good deal of Rice, always half-way between life and death, and they emptied sundry bottles of claret together. And he also met Wordsworth, who was staying in London with his brother. He read to him his *Ode to Pan,* which Wordsworth called a 'pretty piece of paganism,' without showing much enthusiasm about it. Keats was distressed by the way in which

> 'Wordsworth has left a bad impression wherever he visited in town by his egotism, Vanity, and bigotry.'

And it was no doubt the same bad impression that caused him to write later:

> 'It is a great Pity that People should by associating themselves with the finest things, spoil them. Hunt has damned Hampstead and masks and sonnets and Italian tales. Wordsworth has damned the lakes. . . .'

But Christmas and its accustomed gaieties was approaching; Keats was the author of some of the finest lines in the English language. There is no other example of a poet of his age carrying out successfully such a work as *Endymion*. But he was none the less the son of Thomas Keats, who had been a creature of robust health and good spirits, and of Francis Jennings who loved gaiety. It was not to be wondered at, therefore, that he was something of a 'good fellow' himself. He went to the Pantomime, and to other festivities of the season.

> 'The Covent Garden pantomime is a very nice one, but they have a middling Harlequin, a bad Pantaloon, a worse Clown, and a shocking Columbine.'

Altogether, Christmas passed pleasantly enough.

§

On December 28th Haydon gave a dinner to his friends in his new studio in Lisson Grove, where his immense canvas of *Christ's Entry into Jerusalem* was to be seen. The guests assembled were: Wordsworth, Charles Lamb, Ritchie, Keats, Landseer, Monkhouse, and an ineffable person thrown in by chance to add to the general mirth.

We will tell the story of this evening in the words of Haydon's account as given in his *Journal*. As with certain pages of *Charles Demailly*, of *Manette Salomon*, of the *Jeunes France*, even of the *Vie de Bohème*, the painter's account may be taken as a comment on the manners of the time.

'In the morning of this delightful day, a gentleman, a perfect stranger, had called on me. He said he knew my friends, had an enthusiasm for Wordsworth and begged I would procure him the happiness of an introduction. He told me he was a comptroller of stamps, and often had correspondence with the poet. I thought it a liberty but still, as he seemed a gentleman, I told him he might come.

'When we retired to tea we found the comptroller. In introducing him to Wordsworth I forgot to say who he was. After a little time the comptroller looked down, looked up and said to Wordsworth, "Don't you think, sir, Milton was a great genius?" Keats looked at me, Wordsworth looked at the comptroller. Lamb, who was dozing by the fire, turned round and said, "Pray, sir, did you say Milton was a great genius?" "No, sir, I asked Mr. Wordsworth if he were not." "Oh," said Lamb, "then you are a silly fellow." "Charles! my dear Charles!" said Wordsworth; but Lamb, perfectly innocent of the confusion he had created, was off again by the fire.

'After an awful pause the comptroller said, "Don't you think Newton a great genius?" I could not stand it any longer; Keats put his head into my books. Ritchie squeezed in a laugh. Wordsworth seemed asking himself, "Who is this?" Lamb got up, and taking a candle, said, "Sir, will you allow me to look at your phrenological development?" He then turned his back on the poor man, and at every question of the comptroller he chaunted.

"Diddle diddle dumpling, my son John
Went to bed with his breeches on."

The man in office, finding Wordsworth did not know who he was, said in a spasmodic and half-chuckling anticipation of assured victory, "I have had the honour of some correspondence with you, Mr. Wordsworth," "With me, sir?" said Wordsworth, "not that I remember." "Don't you, sir? I am a comptroller of stamps." There was a dead silence; the comptroller evidently thinking that was enough. While we were waiting for Wordsworth's reply, Lamb sung out

"Hey diddle diddle
The cat and the fiddle."

"My dear Charles!" said Wordsworth.

"Diddle diddle dumpling, my son John,"

chaunted Lamb, and then rising, exclaimed, "Do let me have another look at that gentleman's organs." Keats and I hurried Lamb into the painting-room, shut the door and gave way to inextinguishable laughter. Monkhouse followed and tried to get Lamb away. We went back but the comptroller was irreconcilable. We soothed and smiled and asked him to supper. He stayed, though his dignity was sorely affected. However, being a good-natured man we parted all in good humour, and no ill effects followed.

'All the while, until Monkhouse succeeded, we could hear Lamb struggling in the painting-room and calling at intervals, "Who is that fellow? Allow me to see his organs once more?"

'It was indeed an immortal evening. Wordsworth's fine intonation as he quoted Milton and Virgil, Keats's eager inspired look, Lamb's quaint sparkle of lambent humour, so speeded the stream of conversation, that in my life I never passed a more delightful time. All our fun was within bounds. Not a word passed that an apostle might not have listened to. It was a night worthy of the Elizabethan age, and my solemn Jerusalem flashing up by the flame of the fire, with Christ hanging over us like a vision, all made up a picture which will long glow upon

"that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude."'

§

Ordinary workaday events filled Keats's life. He was a prey to anxiety; his nervous condition, and fear of illness troubled him. The fever which sustained him during the composition of *Endymion* and which made him eager to see London and his friends again, had died down. Round about him were constant quarrels, misunderstandings and all for inadequate reasons! Hunt had a grudge against Haydon; general incompatibility of temperament seemed to increase between the two men.

Haydon had asked Reynolds to the 'immortal dinner.' Reynolds did not go, and made no apology. Haydon could not forgive him. It all told on Keats, who missed, at Well Walk, Brown's sturdy companionship. Mrs. Bentley's children were inclined to make a 'horrid row.' He fled to Dilke's for peace, but Dilke could talk of nothing but his boy — and nothing irritated the poet more.

He was copying out *Endymion*. He took the first book to Taylor, who was very well satisfied with it, and wished to have a drawing of Keats by Haydon as a frontispiece to it.

Keats read his *Endymion* to Hunt, who criticised it carpingly. He considered, for example, that the conversations between Peona and Endymion were not natural enough as between brother and sister,

> 'forgetting do ye mind that they are both overshadowed by a supernatural Power, and of force could not speak like Francesca in the Rimini.'

Possibly Hunt was vexed because Keats had not consulted him about it.

> 'The fact is he and Shelley are hurt, and perhaps justly, at my not having showed them the affair officiously and from several hints I have had they appear much disposed to dissect and anatomise any trip or slip I may have made.'

Coleridge was giving lectures on Shakespeare at Hampstead but Keats did not go to them. He chose rather to go to those given by Hazlitt on the English Poets at the Surrey

Institution. He does not seem to have felt that he had as much to learn from Coleridge, at this time, as from the admired Hazlitt.

A very different kind of entertainment at which he assisted was a ' private theatrical ' on which occasion he

> ' went behind the scenes, and mixed freely with the actors and scene-shifters and the rest. There did I hear a little painted Trollop own, very candidly, that she had fail'd in Mary, with a " damn'd if she'd play a serious part again, as long as she lived," and at the same time she was habited as the Quaker in the Review.'

Brown was back in Hampstead, and his companionship acted as a tonic on Keats, made him master of himself again. The factitiousness of the lives of the general run of writers struck him more forcibly than ever. He gave a thought in passing to the memory of his encounter with the unknown lady at Vauxhall; to the lady he had kissed at Hastings, perhaps. He no longer demanded, in order to drive away these ' fair creatures of an hour,' ' a brimming bowl,' nor yet

> ' as deep a draught As e'er from Lethe's wave was quaff'd.'

It was at this time that he composed his lines on the *Mermaid Tavern,* and *Robin Hood*; and consulted Reynolds, who had just became engaged to Miss Drew, about a book of stories in verse. With this idea he chose *Isabella and the Pot of Basil,* and wrote some verses of a poem on the subject.

He was brooding over one of the monuments of the world's poetry: *Hyperion*; and he wrote down that strange fragment, *The Castle Builder;* a simple description of a room, not of an actual room, like the description of Hunt's studio in *Sleep and Poetry,* but of a chamber hung with dreams, wakened into life by the moonlight falling on furniture and ornaments called into existence by sheer fantasy.

And one day Hunt showed him 'an authentic lock of Milton's hair.' The sight of it inspired him. Milton appeared to him as truly as Chaucer at Canterbury, Shakespeare at Stratford-on-Avon.

§

Material cares, the conscientiousness with which he understood and carried out his duties as head of a family, both combined to keep him closely bound to humanity, whose joys and sorrows he was thus compelled to share — and which were thus joined to those of the poet.

He wrote to Bailey:

> 'Twelve days have passed since your last reached me. — What has gone through the myriads of human minds since the twelfth? We talk of the immense Number of Books, the Volumes ranged thousands by thousands — but perhaps more goes through the human intelligence than ever was written. — *How has that unfortunate family lived through the twelve?'*

All mutual recriminations between friends distressed him — they needs must distress one whose idea of friendship was so lofty. He keeps on returning to this subject in his letters. He saw, in such quarrels, the irrefutable proof that human nature has its weak side; and this weak side shocks him in his fellows. He compared the Modern poets with the Elizabethans:

> 'The ancients were Emperors of vast Provinces, they had only heard of the remote ones, and scarcely cared to visit them.'

While on the other hand

> 'each of the moderns like an Elector of Hanover governs his petty state and knows how many straws are swept daily from the Causeways in all his dominions, and has a continual itching that all the Housewives should have their coppers well scoured.'

If he was hard on modern poets, he did not spare the politicians of his own day.

> 'There are many like Sir F. Burdett who like to sit at the head of political dinners — but there are none prepared to suffer in obscurity for their country — the motives of our worst men are Interest and of our best Vanity. We have no Milton, no Algernon Sidney —Governors in these days lose the title of Man in exchange for that of Diplomat and Minister. We breathe in a sort of Official Atmosphere. . . . A Man now entitled Chancellor has the same

honour paid to him whether he be a Hog or a Lord Bacon. No sensation is created by Greatness but by the number of Orders a Man has at his Button holes.'

He accused Napoleon of having done harm to the cause of liberty by teaching people to organise monstrous armies. Would Keats indeed have become in time a Bolshevist, as Bernard Shaw suggests? In any case he never reduced his political creed, as Byron did, to a simple hatred of government in any form.

The future of his country occupied him as did all deep matters. His own innate distinction inclined him towards aristocracy.

However, George had now attained his majority; he had nursed Tom for the last three months. He had to come to some definite decision about his future life, and that of the woman he hoped to marry. He asked John to take his place by his brother's side, since his own presence in London was necessary, and to take the invalid there would be sheer murder. So Keats set out for Teignmouth. He was imprudent enough to travel on the outside of the coach, on a very stormy night.

IX

At Teignmouth Keats devoted himself to correcting the proofs of *Endymion*, which his publishers were anxious to bring out — and there is a series of letters from him to his friends, full of humorous complaints about the abominable climate of Devonshire; mud, hail, wind, fog, rain — rain which falls ceaselessly to such a degree that, as he puts it,

> 'The green is beautiful, as they say, and pity it is that it is amphibious — *mais!* but alas! the flowers here wait as naturally for the rain twice a day as the Mussels do for the Tide.'

And again:

> 'I lay awake last night listening to the Rain with a sense of being drowned and rotted like a grain of wheat.'

Just as he had declared that he shared the happiness of the sparrow picking up crumbs on the gravel. Has a poet personality?

Keats was obliged to remain in the company of a consumptive, from whom he must hide his nervous agitations.

George and Tom had made friends with a few people at Teignmouth; but they were provincial people, and Keats had come straight from the brilliant life of London. Mrs. Jeffreys

and her daughters made some slight pretension to be literary, and were charming enough, if occasionally a little ridiculous and sentimental; Tom's doctor, Dr. Turton, was a collector of sea-shells, and rather an original; but this did not make up for the horrors of the climate, and the stupidity of the local inhabitants: uncouth, ignorant, prejudiced, and backward.

'Had England been a large Devonshire, we should not have won the Battle of Waterloo.' 'I think it well for the honour of Britain that Julius Cæsar did not first land in this Country.'

A grim pronouncement comes from him, under the guise of a joke:

'I hope by this you stand on your right foot. If you are not — that's all — I intend to cut all sick people if they do not make up their minds to cut Sickness — a fellow to whom I have a complete aversion, and who strange to say is harboured and countenanced in several houses where I visit — he is sitting now quite impudent between me and Tom — he insults me at poor Jem Rice's — and you have seated him before now between us at the Theatre, when I thought he looked with a longing eye at poor Kean. I shall say, once for all, to my friends generally and severally, cut that fellow, or I cut you.' — So he writes to Reynolds from Teignmouth.

The wet, moist climate weighs on him, till he is 'sometimes so very sceptical as to think Poetry itself a mere

> Jack o' Lantern to amuse whoever may chance to be struck with its brilliance.' There are 'Things real — things semi-real — and nothings. Things real, such as existence of Sun, Moon, and Stars — and passages of Shakespeare. Things semi-real, such as love, the Clouds, etc., which require a greeting of the Spirit to make them wholly exist — and Nothings, which are made great and dignified by an ardent pursuit,'

amongst which illusions he is, at this moment, inclined to place poetry. And, writing to Rice, he points out that, just as there

> 'is ever the same quantity of matter constituting this habitable globe . . . so very likely a certain portion of intellect was spun forth into the thin air, for the brains of man to prey upon it . . . that which was in Milton's head could not find room in Charles the Second's — He like a Moon attracted intellect to its flow — it has not ebbed yet, but has left the shore-pebbles all bare. . . .'

But this whole letter is in a joking vein, and at the end of it he remarks slily that

> 'some of the little Barmaids look'd at me as if I knew Jem Rice.'

As always, there were financial worries; George sent his brothers twenty pounds from London, which were very welcome, since Keats had been obliged to borrow from his landlady.

Reynolds was his chief correspondent at this time. He sent him a *Letter,* in verse, in which he recaptured, in order to describe Claude Lorrain's *Enchanted Castle,* something of the spirit which had inspired him in the *Castle Builder.* This letter, perfect as a poem, begins on a note of fantasy, familiar to us, and ends in mystery. The windows of Claude's *Enchanted Castle* become, as Sir Sidney Colvin justly remarks, those 'magic casements' charmed by the song of the nightingale, which open

> 'on the foam
> Of perilous seas, in faery-lands forlorn.'

How moving it is to hear Barrés, in his comments on Claude, recalling Keats:

> 'In the case of all these masters [he is speaking of Poussin and Claude] there is no finish of detail; but they have so accurately seized upon the vital facts, that we have no need of the rest. It is this that subtly gives us a contact with something higher. With them we are in a world of beauty, and that gives a sense of some yet greater beauty beyond it. This is the true classicism. Emotion, feeling, art are there in naked purity, without any superfluous details. So is created the necessary atmosphere, by which the imagination is led on imperceptibly in the right direction. Keats's *Ode to Melancholy:* the lover holding his mistress's hand. There is something there that is somehow marvellously intellectual.'

His other letters are confidential, profound, and betray the continual drama of which his soul is the stage. Frequent returnings in on himself showed him the necessity of acquiring knowledge, in order to 'ease the Burden of the Mystery' which is the heritage of every living being, and which grows heavier with time.

'The difference of high Sensations with and without knowledge appears to me this: in the latter case we are falling continually ten thousand fathoms deep and being blown up again, without wings, and with all horror of a bare-shouldered creature — in the former case, our shoulders are fledged, and we go through the same air and space without fear.'

This problem of knowledge, and of destiny, haunts him. His thought translates itself into images:

'I compare human life to a large Mansion of Many apartments, two of which I can only describe, the doors of the rest being as yet shut upon me. — The first we step into we call the infant or thoughtless Chamber, in which we remain as long as we do not think. — We remain there a long while, and notwithstanding the doors of the second Chamber remain wide open, showing a bright appearance, we care not to hasten to it; but are at length imperceptibly impelled by the awakening of the thinking principle within us — we no sooner get into the second Chamber, which I shall call the Chamber of Maiden-Thought, than we become intoxicated with the light and

the atmosphere, we see nothing but pleasant wonders, and think of delaying there for ever in delight: However, among the effects this breathing is father of is that tremendous one of sharpening one's vision into the heart and nature of Man — of convincing one's nerves that the world is full of Misery and Heart-break, Pain, Sickness and oppression — whereby this Chamber of Maiden-Thought becomes gradually darkened, and at the same time, on all sides of it, many doors are set open — but all dark — all leading to dark passages — We see not the balance of good and evil — we are in a mist — we are now in that state — We feel the "burden of the Mystery."'

And surely that burden began to overwhelm Keats first of all at the death of his father, when his child's eyes were opened to the world, the eyes of a child too sensitive to pass things by lightly and unthinkingly.

Tom's health was all the time causing him very deep anxiety. However, there is reason to believe that they had a flying visit from James Rice, himself none too well, but one of those people who seem always able to get the better of such disabilities, and that would be a perfect tonic. Rice had unearthed a copy of *Guzman d'Alfarache,* which he gave Keats; and Keats himself had found and bought a 'black-letter Chaucer.'

And then he received the first copy of *Endymion.* He was disappointed; the poem had already become ancient history for him. He had left the whole business of its being printed entirely to his publishers, and apologises for this in a letter to

them. He was beginning to think about Hyperion; and was taking care of his medical text-books, not knowing what the future might have in store for him. It was by no means clear when he and his brothers and sister would come into full possession of their inheritance, which was still in the course of being apportioned in the Court of Chancery.

Mr. Abbey did not exert himself. That wholesaler of Pancras Lane knew very well that one cannot get on in the world without money. To practise medicine seemed to Keats a kind of backsliding, but all the same it was a more honourable way of making a living than to sell his pen to the book-trade — in spite of the fact that he wrote easily and successfully, when he tried his hand at dramatic criticism — but in that case perhaps the thought that he was being of service to Reynolds lightened the task for him.

The climate, the confinement, had a disastrous effect on both Tom and John. The first had a second bad hemorrhage; the second was irritable, discontented with himself and everybody else. He had finished *Isabella:* a pathetic piece of work, morbid in parts, strained, which later on he disposed of in these terms:

> 'too much inexperience of line, and simplicity of knowledge in it — which might do very well after one's death, but not while one is alive. . . . I intend to use more finesse with the Public. . . . Isabella is what I should call were I a reviewer "A weak-sided Poem" with an amusing sober-sadness about it.'

In short, things were going from bad to worse. The two brothers left Teignmouth in a post-chaise for London.

George had decided to emigrate; he intended to buy land in America, become a gentleman-farmer and, although quite ignorant about such affairs, risked his whole fortune. He had signed a contract with a Quaker, a Mr. Birkbeck, who was known as 'The King of the Prairies,' and had all the confidence in a rosy future of a boy of twenty-one. He married before setting out. His wife agreed to go with him. This devotion on the part of so young a girl — Georgiana was only sixteen — filled Keats with enthusiasm.

He himself felt the need of reinvigoration. The landscape and the country round about London did not give him the kind of setting he wanted for his overthrown Titans, grouped around Saturn, where their voices could echo and re-echo again. The *Edinburgh Magazine* was continuing to publish articles against Hunt. In one of these Keats was referred to as the 'amiable Mr. Keats.' The compliment held promises.

§

Brown was projecting a tour in Scotland. His idea was to go on foot, and he invited Keats to accompany him. Keats accepted. He only knew plains, woodlands growing on gentle slopes, gardens, and the sea washing the shores of the Isle of Wight. What surprises must there not be in store for him in mountains, caves, lakes, and forests?

But could he leave Tom? If he refused Brown's invitation,

the boy, who had no illusions about his condition, would only think himself more seriously affected than was the case. At last, after many hesitations, Keats decided to hand over the invalid to the care of their neighbours the Dilkes, Severn, Haslam, their landlord the postman, Bentley, and Dr. Sawrey. Tom could have been in no better hands.

The departure was fixed for the month of August. The two emigrants, George and Georgiana, accompanied the tourists as far as Liverpool. *Endymion* had been on sale for several weeks.

§

There have been various attempts to decide why and how Keats had come to choose the fable of *Endymion* as the subject of his first long poem. But after all, one does not choose the subject of a poem, any more than one chooses the woman who is destined to play a disastrous or else a beneficial part in one's life. Both, brought on the scene by who knows what demons or gods, appear at that very moment when one awaits them least. There is a mystery there which is beyond the range of commentators and biographers. Only poets can understand it, and it is the object of their work to explain it.

The finest poems spring spontaneously from us after a period of natural labour of which we are unconscious. The poems which are never written, but always thought of, produce those fruits which from one season to another wither at the end of a branch, and only fall to the ground when the tree dies.

It was not with any intention of writing an ode on a nightingale that Keats sat, one morning in the spring, under a plum-tree, coming into leaf, with his eyes turned towards the windows of his love's house — whom also he had not deliberately chosen.

Sir Sydney Colvin and Amy Lowell recount the works which may have influenced Keats. It is likely enough that some comedy, masque, drama, poem, in which the moon appeared either as a person, or a piece of scenery, may have touched Keats's sensitive nature — but there can be no doubt that neither Ovid, nor Shakespeare, nor Ben Jonson, nor Marlow, nor Fletcher, nor Drayton, gave him the idea of telling the story of the shepherd of Latmos; that his inspiration was not literary, and that he owed it solely to his own inclinations.

Let us remember that since his youth, all his friends and companions had regarded him as having some connection with the Moon. Did not George Felton Matthew declare, in the days when he knew Keats as a medical student, whose genius he had been one of the first to discover:

'Oh no! 'tis the Queen of those regions of air,
The gay fields of fancy thy spirit has bless'd;
She cherish'd thy childhood with fostering care
And nurtured her Boy with the milk of her breast.'

And Keats calls his planet 'Creator of sweet poets' before describing her in all her aspects, in every kind of sky, and analysing her mysterious power, working on men's souls, on thoughts, and seas.

To tell the story of a mortal enchanted by the moon — that was the work that Keats so fatally carried out — fatally, because his own imagination, endowing with equal power myth and reality, became the fabled shepherd who charmed it by the music of his name, and moved it by his likeness to itself.

Many poets have written fine poetry about the Moon. Hugo in his *Fête chez Thérèse,* and *Ruth et Boaz;* Leconte de Lisle in *Les Loups;* and, amongst prose-writers, Chateaubriand, Maupassant, have all been inspired by the moon. But Keats, Verlaine, Laforgue, alone, with different objects, and by different means, have succeeded in creating its true atmosphere.

And it is in that atmosphere that *Endymion* develops. The kiss of Diana wakens the shepherd of Latmos, and leaves him a victim of that peculiar melancholy, moon-sickness. He tells his secret to Peona, his mysterious sister, and goes in search of her who has so deeply troubled him. He follows her across the world; and in the course of his wanderings interspersed with slumbers peopled by revealing visions, he meets Venus and Adonis; Arethusa and Alpheus; Glaucus and Circe; the subterranean divinities; the caves, homes of dead lovers; Neptune and his palace, where Sirens and Tritons hold revelry; Bacchus triumphant (a recollection of a canvas by Titian of which a print adorned Hunt's studio). He meets at last an Indian maiden (calling to mind the episode in Legrand's novel of the Macedonian who fell in love with the dark maiden, an episode which had struck Keats forcibly when he was a student). Endymion falls in

love with the mortal. He fears to be unfaithful to his vision, but the daughter of earth and the vision prove to be one and the same.

For Keats these fables were not simple allegories, themes on which to display his powers. They were for him a means of expressing his ideas on man, the soul, and love. Keats, as a healthy being, regarded sexual love as the principle of all things. Bailey, sentimental theologian, objected, and this difference of opinion was the basis of many and fertile discussions at Oxford between the two friends.

Keats was not content to tell stories by following exactly the texts of the ancients. He altered their myths, rejuvenated them, re-created them, enriched them anew, made them altogether his own.

The same ambition held Ronsard in his *Hymnes*. When one re-reads the *Hymne de l'Automne,* for example, if one contemplates the eternal beauties, the marvellous description of the Palace of Nature; that of the wind ' weary with having passed over the sea of Africa, and its sands; who has folded her wings, to sleep, as a falcon lets his own wings rest crosswise over his back, when he sleeps in the forest.'

A single philosophical idea: *the reality and the dream are often confused together,* governs this work, which realises admirably the conception which Keats had of the true nature of long poems:

' a . . . Region to wander in, where they (the Lovers of Poetry) may pick and choose, and in which the images are so numerous that many are forgotten and found new in a second Reading.'

X

KEATS's tour in Scotland was really a voyage of exploration in himself.

He had, increasingly, the impulse to learn, to acquire knowledge, to *think*. He would have liked to have gone into seclusion for several years, and he took only one book into the North with him: Cary's translation of Dante. Brown's library was no larger: he carried a Milton.

George's departure, with Georgiana, for America, and Tom's health, preoccupied Keats continually. At Liverpool where the animation of the scene, the port, the sea-air delighted him, his brother and sister-in-law took their farewell of him. His former fellow-student Stephens was practising at St. Albans, and as the party stopped at Redbourne, near by, Keats was able to meet him again. He did not dream that Stephens would make his fortune by inventing the famous ink which bears his name.

Brown and Keats, their knapsacks on their backs, set off on their journey. The weather was bad; Keats had a susceptible throat. Neither Brown nor he worried about it; nevertheless this fanciful proceeding became a death-march for Keats.

In his letters he did not give many enthusiastic descriptions of the scenery. He notes the little things of life, the dress, the casts of countenance, the appearance of the houses, their

poverty. In one village a country dancing-school in full play charmed him. They were not dancing the cotillon, newly imported from France, but country dances. The sturdy peasant folk threw themselves into the measure with joyous heart. Keats felt deeply the ' glory of Patriotism, the glory of making by any means a country happier.' And one remembers M. Violet, with his travelling violin, teaching the Iroquois to dance.

The days of the travellers were well filled. Brown was indefatigable; Keats kept up with him as best he could. Plenty of solid food, and whiskey and water, that toddy dear to the heart of Burns, cheered them in the evening at the inn.

The people of the country took them for pedlars. What were they selling? Jewellery, razors, spectacles? Friend Brown carried a magnificent pair of these last on his nose. What an odd pair of tourists! What attire! Brown's spectacles were very impressive; his baldness, his white hat, his tartan suit, his knapsack, his switch, the plaid, which draped his shoulders. When Keat tore his only coat he had to hand it over to be mended; and wait where he was until it came back from the tailor's.

The life in the fresh air recalled to him his days spent in the country as a child. He sent his sister Fanny a kind of fantasy in rhyme, in which he described how, to the horror of his grandmother, his mother, and the maid, he filled the house with creatures caught in the fields. He passed through the countryside where Meg Merrilees boiled her pot. One gets the impression that this countryside, seen at last, held something of disillusionment for him. He wanted to see

something else; Brown and he went to Belfast. The misery, the brutishness of the Irish peasantry, were a shock to him. The poorest of English cottages would seem a palace beside these hovels. He asked himself — thinking, perhaps, of Shelley, who two years before, had gone with his young wife on a mission of revolutionary propaganda into Ireland — how any being provided with a certain amount of reasoning power could hope to get anything out of such people.

One day he met

> 'the worst dog-kennel you ever saw, placed upon two poles from a mouldy fencing — in such a wretched thing sat a squalid old woman, squat like an ape half-starved, from a scarcity of biscuit in its passage from Madagascar to the Cape, with a pipe in her mouth.'

The sight haunted him. 'What a thing would be a history of her life and sensations,' he writes.

> On the outskirts of Belfast, he heard, passing 'through a most wretched suburb, that most disgusting of all noises, worse than the Bag-pipes — the laugh of a Monkey — the chatter of women — the scream of a Macaw — I mean the sound of the Shuttle.'

More intolerable still, once they were back in Scotland, were the gossipings of the person commissioned to look after the cottage of Burns.

He complained in a letter too of the gad-flies,

'damn 'em, they have been at me ever since I left the Swan and Two Necks.' (The inn in London from which they had started.)

One traces a hint of irritation in the way in which he makes fun of the odd ways of his travelling companion. At the inn, of an evening, Keats would stretch himself out on two chairs, to rest, while Brown made ready to continue his diary of the tour.

'He affronts my luxury by pulling out of his knapsack 1st his paper—2ndly his pens and last his ink. Now I would not care if he would change a little. I say now why not, Bailey, take out his pens first sometimes. But I might as well tell a hen to hold up her head before she drinks instead of afterwards.'

His sensitiveness increased, and drove him in the direction of criticism rather than admiration. Parts of the countryside appealed to him, none the less. He noticed, and describes in his letters the effects of light on the mountains and on the water; flocks lying in the valleys; the flight of eagles, who seem to rest motionless on the wing. He relieves his spleen by making a comparison between the Scotch and the Irish. He prefers the former to the latter, without feeling any great affection for them. But the Irish he regards as a people brutalised through being priest-ridden.

Disappointed in both Nature and the people of the country, turning over in his brain a work which oppressed him more heavily day by day, but of which he could not as

yet clearly distinguish the outlines, he was still living continually turned inwards upon himself, and he confides his thought in part to his dear friends Reynolds and Bailey.

In spite of Brown's gay company, he felt alone. In looking at the sea, how could he help thinking of George and Georgiana, who loved one another, and then of the home and hearth that were never to be his? His weariness had often made him long for death in the past; but now he longed to live: he had duties to fulfill; he hoped to see his nephews to be in America; he hoped to see Reynolds, whom he loved as a brother, happily married, above all since he had had the pleasure of learning to love a sister-in-law. He reproached himself for not having taken enough care of his own health, and advised his convalescent friend to take great care of his own.

His letter to Bailey lets us more intimately into his secrets. The poverty of his sensuous life tortured him. He was surrounded solely by people who were happy in a normal way. Reynolds was engaged; Bailey was engaged; George could not have much doubt of the worth of a woman who, at sixteen, sought in his company the great adventure, over there in America.

Keats was unaware, and remained unaware, that Brown too was tied by a serious liaison — a liaison which, as proved and described by Amy Lowell, was later on to explain his conduct, and to have a terrible effect on Keats's destiny.

Casual acquaintances, companions, women friends: the Matthews, the Reynolds, Mrs. Dilke — and above all Georgiana, whom he would certainly have loved, that is Keats's

balance-sheet of passion. Not one woman on it of whom he could think as his own. He tells Bailey — and it is significant in the light of after events — that at one time he had regarded women as goddesses, but that he had not the right to expect of women more than they could give:

> 'when among men, I have no evil thoughts, no malice, no spleen — I feel free to speak or to be silent — I can listen, and from every one I can learn — my hands are in my pockets, I am free from all suspicion and comfortable. When I am among women I have evil thoughts, malice, spleen — I cannot speak, or be silent — I am full of suspicions and therefore listen to nothing — I am in a hurry to be gone. You must be charitable and put all this perversity to my being disappointed since my boyhood . . . after all I do think better of womankind than to suppose they care whether Mister John Keats *five feet high likes them or not.*' (The italics are ours.)

The smallness of his stature! What a contrast with his trim figure, his head of a Greek God! Let us remember, once more, Mr. Middleton Murry's phrase:

> 'Had Keats been six inches taller, the history of English literature in the nineteenth century might have been different.'

He thought of his sister Fanny, whom he wished to remove, as soon as possible, from the care of Mr. Abbey; he thought of George and Georgiana with whom he intended

to spend a year, some day — but always he was haunted by the thought of death. As he had done to Reynolds, so now he advised Bailey to take care of his health. He had lost, for his part, for ever, that inestimable benefit.

Towards the end of July, in the Island of Mull — a journey made to see Fingal's Cave — he caught cold. The cold attacked his throat, always susceptible, which had given trouble throughout his journey. Nothing much, he thought, or tried to think; the expedition was continued.

After Fingal, he and Brown climbed Ben Nevis. The climb was accomplished in fine weather, but the descent in fog. The climbers began to flag; in order to raise their courage and prick their pride the guide told them the story of a Mrs. Cameron, the fattest woman in the country, who, thanks to her energy, wisely stimulated by whiskey, had conquered rocks and ravines. Keats composed a dialogue between the stout lady and the lofty mountain.

At last Keats's indisposition reached a point at which a doctor had to be consulted, who insisted on an immediate return. He left Brown, who continued the tour by himself, and took passage on a fishing-smack at Cromarty for London.

The last two pictures which he carried away with him from the North were as impressive to his mind as all the ruins, cathedrals, castles, lakes, mountains, and his own first poetic emotions had been. He saw the remains of Beauly Abbey, and in the churchyard, the place where there were piled a number of skulls. But above all, he had seen Fingal's Cave.

'Suppose now,' he writes to Tom, 'the Giants who rebelled against Jove had taken a whole Mass of black Columns and bound them together like bunches — and then with immense axes had made a cavern in the body of these columns.'

For the first time, Keats is making a direct allusion to *Hyperion*. He had at last found what he had, if unconsciously, gone to Scotland to seek. The vision of Fingal, the music, the sonorous tone of Milton's lines and Dante's, had created in him the necessary atmosphere for his titanic poem. He was ready to write. He was ready, too, to submit to the onslaughts of a passion, devastating in itself, for which he was made ready by all his torments of mind, and the near approach of death.

XI

KEATS went straight to Well Walk; he arrived with his shoes worn out, his clothes torn, his fur cap in ribbons, a hole in his knapsack. His throat was still giving trouble, but his nine days at sea had done a certain amount of good.

Tom, in spite of the care with which he had been surrounded, was eager to see his brother again; and John took up his former position of sick-nurse. The two brothers lived there together, both ill, and trying to conceal their fears from one another. Keats had no one to confide in; Brown was still in Scotland; Reynolds in Devonshire with his fiancée; Haydon and Dilke were ill and away; Hunt was away also.

Mr. Abbey, under pretext of Tom's state of health, kept Fanny a closer prisoner than ever. Keats, in short letters, pressed her to get leave from her guardian — who, however, remained implacable — to come and see Tom. He made the best of things, and repeatedly expressed a tentative opinion that Tom was getting better. In these notes he answers his sister's questions; tells her that he has brought her back some Scotch pebbles; advises her not to learn the flageolet, but promises her that he will get her one if she really wants it. All matters to interest a child.

But the improvement in Tom's health was in reality only illusory. The boy was growing weaker daily. It is in his

letters to George and Georgiana that we find Keats expressing his real anxieties.

> 'I have Fanny and I have you — three people whose happiness to me is sacred — it does annul that selfish sorrow which I should otherwise fall into, living as I do with poor Tom who looks upon me as his only comfort — the tears will come into your Eyes — let them — and embrace each other — thank heaven for what happiness you have, and after thinking a moment or two that you suffer in common with all Mankind hold it not a sin to regain your cheerfulness . . . the Moon is now shining full and brilliant — she is the same to me in Matter, what you are to me in Spirit.'

After this expression, which shows how much the Moon was his inspiration, there follow pages of unequalled tenderness on the subject of fraternal love, which show only too clearly a heart torn with suffering.

§

The critics had awakened, furious.

Attacks had been threatened; they were not unexpected. Their violence, and their cowardliness were such that Shelley, Byron and others ascribed the poet's premature death to this onslaught of spite and cowardice.

It was not the author of *Endymion* who was the object of the attack, so much as the follower of Hunt, liberal, editor

of the *Examiner,* critic of the Prince Regent; Hunt, the man of letters, who had ventured, in his *Feast of the Poets* some witticisms at the expense of the sacrosanct figure of Wordsworth.

In order to guard against unfair attacks on Keats, Bailey, who by now had a curacy in the north, and who, at Stirling, had met Lockhart, one of Blackwood's reviewers, told him privately something of Keats and his circumstances. And Taylor, one of Keats's publishers, had also done what he could to protect Keats from the consequences of his purely personal, and in no way political, friendship with Hunt. But it was to no purpose. Gifford, in spite of Taylor's personal appeal to him for fair treatment, published, without altering a word, the long diatribe of his collaborator Croker, who 'would almost doubt that any man in his senses would put his real name to such a rhapsody.'

Blackwood's took up the work and Lockhart was deputed to deal with Keats.

John Gibson Lockhart prided himself on having known Goethe — not long, nor intimately, we can imagine, since he was only twenty-two. He was more pedantic than learned, and had a contempt for those who could not read the Latin, Greek and German poets in their own language. He afterwards became Sir Walter Scott's son-in-law; and Scott was suspected for a time, quite unjustly, of having inspired the article written by his biographer-to-be, or, at all events, to have been aware of it without disapproving, which after all comes to the same thing.

'It is a better and a wiser thing,' wrote this contemptible reviewer, 'to be a starved apothecary than a starved poet; so back to the shop, Mr. John, back to "plasters, pills and ointment boxes," etc. But, for Heaven's sake, young Sangrado, be a little more sparing of extenuatives and soporifics in your practice than you have been in your poetry.'

This is the conclusion, rather less violent than the rest, of the article which would have to be reproduced in full to give a real idea of its virulence and bad taste. Lockhart continued the cowardice with which he attacked Keats after the poet was in his grave. He actually wrote a parody, 'Elegy on my Tom Cat,' in ridicule of Shelley's immortal lament on the death of Keats, *Adonais*. Shelley himself had judged *Endymion* severely enough, to the extent of saying that: 'much praise is due to me for having read it, the author's intention appearing to be that no person should possibly get to the end of it.' But this opinion he expressed in a private letter; Shelley would never have made it public.

The *Quarterly* and *Blackwood's* were both Tory journals. They united in the attempt to kill Keats as a writer, which roused indignation amongst all right-thinking people, amongst whom were, it goes without saying, all Keats's personal friends. Bailey told Blackwood roundly to his face that it was 'infamous.' Blackwood blandly replied that he himself had regretted it when he saw it in the paper. But why then had he allowed it to appear? Bailey demanded to be allowed to make a reply; but he could not have done

this, or made a defence of Keats, without attacking Lockhart. He then wrote an article, attacking *Blackwood's,* which he sent to the *Edinburgh Magazine* (Constable's) but this was returned to him without comment. Reynolds was more fortunate. The *Alfred West of England Journal, and General Advertiser* published his article in praise of Keats; an article which Hunt, uncomfortably aware of his own share in the adventure, reprinted in abridged form in his *Examiner.* Two letters in defence of Keats were also published by the *Morning Chronicle* and these were sent to him by Taylor and Hessey.

This embittered press campaign did not discourage the poet unduly. It had, at any rate, shown him who amongst his friends were faithful to him, and how staunchly so, and also how many unknown admirers he had. He realised that by continuing in such a vein his enemies would end by harming themselves alone — he felt, above all, that come what might, he 'would be among the English poets after his death.'

Reynolds had at last returned; his rheumatism had improved. He had just paid a long visit to his fiancée, Miss Drew. He was, therefore, in excellent spirits. He lost no time in turning his energies in the direction of encouraging and urging Keats on; Keats, on whom, in spite of his indomitable energy, the post of sick-nurse was telling, and who was bewildered, in spite of his faith in his own powers, by human injustice.

Reynolds was delighted with *Isabella.* What a reply to the English and Scotch reviewers alike! Byron had replied

to the attacks of these last by an elaborate satire; let Keats reply by a masterpiece, as befitted a poet. As for the detractors of *Endymion,* let them be; ' men do not set their muscles and strain their sinews to break a straw.'

But during all these months, as he said later, Keats never let a day pass without thinking of *Hyperion.* He was possessed by that poem, although he could only work at it intermittently. Tom's state of health drove him to despair; and an intense desire to live, to spend his energy, seized him.

What George had to tell him about the Americans did not excite his sympathy.

> ' Those Americans are great, but they are not sublime Man. . . . If I had a prayer to make for any great good, next to Tom's recovery, it should be that one of your Children should be the first American Poet.'

He tells — and all in a manner which shows that it gave him great pleasure — every smallest detail of his life: interviews, dinners, talks with Haydon, Hunt, his publishers and Rice.

He met, at this time, at the Reynolds', a cousin of theirs, a young girl, an Anglo-Indian, Miss Jane Cox. The picture he draws of her is important, in the light it throws on Keats's feelings for and attitude towards women:

> ' The Miss Reynolds are very kind to me. . . . On my return the first day I called they were in a sort of taking or bustle about a Cousin of theirs who having fallen out

with her Grandpapa in a serious manner was invited by Mrs. R. to take Asylum in her house. She is an east Indian and ought to be her Grandfather's Heir. . . . She is not a Cleopatra, but she is at least a Charmian. She has a rich Eastern look; she has fine eyes and fine manners. When she comes into a room she makes an impression the same as the Beauty of a Leopardess. She is too fine and too conscious of herself to repulse any Man who may address her — from habit she thinks that nothing *particular*. I always find myself more at ease with such a woman; the picture before me always gives me a life and animation which I cannot possibly feel with anything inferior. I am at such times too much occupied in admiring to be awkward or in a tremble. I forget myself entirely because I live in her. You will by this time think I am in love with her; so before I go any further I will tell you I am not — she kept me awake one Night as a tune of Mozart's might do. I speak of the thing as a pastime and an amusement, than which I can feel none deeper than a conversation with an imperial woman, the very "yes" and "no" of whose Lips is to me a Banquet. . . . She walks across a room in such a manner that a Man is drawn towards her with a magnetic Power. . . . I believe though she has faults — the same as Charmian and Cleopatra might have had.'

None the less, the voice, the movements of this daughter of the East haunted him for a long time; and it was in this state of susceptibility to sensuous impression that he met,

for the second time, in London, near Bedford Row, the mysterious lady of Hastings.

'I passed her and turned back: she seemed glad of it — glad to see me, and not offended at my passing her before. We walked on towards Islington. . . . As we went along, sometimes through shabby, sometimes through decent streets, I had my guessing at work, not knowing what it would be, and prepared to meet any surprise.'

She took him finally to her own home. There they went

'upstairs into her sitting-room, a very tasty sort of place with Books, Pictures, a bronze statue of Buonaparte, Music, æolian Harp, a Parrot, a Linnet, a Case of choice Liqueurs, etc., etc. She behaved in the kindest manner — made me take home a Grouse for Tom's dinner. Asked for my Address for the purpose of sending more game. . . . I expect to spend some pleasant hours with her now and then: in which I feel I shall be of service to her in matters of knowledge and taste.'

We do not know what further episodes, if any there were, took place with regard to this lady, but the beautiful cousin of the Reynolds's, and the mysterious lady from Hastings both had their share in setting Keats meditating on the subject of marriage. He tells in a letter to George his preference for his 'sublime solitude' to any union, whatever delights of luxury, love, beauty and happiness might belong to it.

'The roaring of the wind is my wife and the Stars through the window pane are my Children. . . . I feel more and more every day, as my imagination strengthens, that I do not live in this world alone but in a thousand worlds. — No sooner am I alone than shapes of epic greatness are stationed around me, and serve my Spirit the office which is equivalent to a King's bodyguard.'

The efforts which Keats made to get Fanny to Well Walk were all in vain. Mr. Abbey 'says that once more between this and the Holidays will be sufficient.' However, in the end, he allowed himself to be persuaded, and gave a grudging permission, less, probably, out of kindness of heart than because he was tired of Keats's importunity; Keats urged the visit chiefly on the ground that it was impossible for him to leave Tom in order to come to see her.

In his notes and letters he refers to his brother at this time always as 'poor Tom'; he was reading *King Lear* at this time, whilst he was watching by his dying brother, in which those words 'Poor Tom' so appropriately occur.

§

'Early the next morning,' writes Brown, of the night when Tom died, 'I was awakened in bed by a pressure on my hand. It was Keats, who came to tell me that his brother was no more. I said nothing, and we both remained silent for a while, my hand fast locked in his. At length, my thoughts returning from the dead to the living, I said

— " Have nothing more to do with those lodgings — and alone too! Had you not better live with me? " He paused, pressed my hand warmly, and replied, " I think it would be better." From that moment he was my inmate.'

Haslam had prepared George and Georgiana for the catastrophe. Keats had only to give them a few details.

' The last days of poor Tom were of the most distressing nature; but his last moments were not so painful, and his very last was without pang. I will not enter into any parsonic comments on death — yet the common observations of the commonest people on death are as true as their proverbs. I have scarce a doubt of immortality of some nature or other — neither had Tom.'

XII

FANNY was the elder daughter of Mrs. Brawne, the widow to whom Brown had let his part of Wentworth Place during the summer, the house which he shared with the Dilkes; they had built it together.

The rest of the Brawne family consisted of a little boy and a younger sister. The Brawnes were well-off, and had a large circle of acquaintance. The beauty of the Hampstead district, the pleasant society of the Dilkes, with whom they were acquainted, and who had children of the same age, and who shared the same roof and garden, all united to decide them, when their renting of Brown's house came to an end, to settle down near these new friends, rather than return to London or elsewhere. They moved to a house on Downshire Hill, near by.

When he left for Scotland, Keats had specially charged the Dilkes to look after Tom. No doubt Mrs. Dilke had brought Mrs. Brawne and her daughter to Well Walk, to visit him, and no doubt she told them that the brother of the lonely invalid was a fine and handsome poet; no doubt she lent them his *Poems* and *Endymion*.

Fanny Brawne was lively, quick-witted, intelligent, and a voluminous reader. Keats saw her, for the first time, at the Dilkes', on his return from Scotland. He found her

'beautiful and elegant, graceful, silly, fashionable and strange. We have a little tiff now and then — and she behaves a little better, or I must have sheered off.'

Keats was at that time worn out with ill-health and nursing, dispirited by the attacks of reviewers, vaguely troubled perhaps by Miss Cox, the lady who walked like a leopardess, or by the other lady from Hastings. But these quarrels with Fanny Brawne were in no way serious, and there was already a sympathetic feeling between them, when Keats set up house with Brown at Wentworth Place — far from the 'horried row' made by the Bentley children.

Keats's friends gathered round him. There was no kind of attention that they failed to show him. Since the postal rates had been enhanced, Haslam made him a present of some specially thin paper for the purpose of his long letters to America. They tried to amuse him, to take him off to London. He went to the Novellos' and heard music. But his thoughts could find no refuge except in his own family. George and Georgiana, in spite of distance, are at his side,

'I remember your Ways and Manners and actions, I know your manner of thinking, your manner of feeling: I know what shape your joy or your sorrow would take; I know the manner of your walking, standing, sauntering, sitting down, laughing, punning, and every action so truly that you seem near to me.'

This need for reproducing physical details was characteristic of Keats. In one of these same journal letters, he describes

for the exiles his room, the play of light and shade, his own attitude, the books lying before him, saying that to him it would be profoundly interesting to know how Shakespeare was sitting when he wrote: 'To be or not to be'—and, indeed, it is such details that create the essential part of every written work (letter, poem, comedy, novel); the atmosphere. So, in order to present himself as vividly to George and Georgiana as if they had been in the room with him, he tells them the smallest details of his life, as he writes, with little, amusing incidents thrown in.

Amongst others, he tells the story of the unknown admirer, who sent him a sonnet and a note for £25. His comment on the affair is:

> 'Now this appears to me all very proper—if I had refused it I should have behaved in a very braggadocio dunderheaded manner—and yet the present galls me a little, and I do not know whether I shall not return it if I ever meet with the donor after, whom to no purpose I have written.'

Men of letters disgusted Keats on the whole. There was no society in which he was less at ease. He tells, in the same letter, how he had seen Haydon, who was full of an account by a 'young Hoppner who went with Captain Ross on a voyage of discovery to the Poles,' of the polar solitudes, and the intense joy of the sailors when on coming south again, after 'continual day—the sun ever moving in a circle round above their heads' they at last saw a star again. Is there not a likeness between Keats's soul, and these

dark and icy wastes? And is not any touch of joy amidst the suffering like the joy of these sailors in seeing a star at last?

The star of his destiny led him to Hampstead, and forbade himself at first to believe in the power of that star. 'Shall I give you Miss Brawne?' the first thing about her that leaped to his eyes and bedazzled him was that she was about his own height — that is to say, a woman who would not be likely to think of him as 'little Keats.' And from the same pen that had just been making a sketch of a Mr. Redhall —

> 'a little Man with an innocent powdered upright head, he lisps with a protruding under lip — he has two Nieces, each one would weigh three of him — he knew Bartolozzi.'

He continues in a tone that mingles admiration with criticism:

> 'She is about my height — with a fine style of countenance of the lengthened sort — she wants sentiment in every feature — she manages to make her hair look well — her nostrils are fine — though a little painful — her mouth is bad and good — her Profile is better than her full-face which indeed is not full but pale and thin without showing any bone. Her shape is very graceful and so are her movements — her Arms are good, her hands baddish — her feet tolerable. She is not seventeen — but she is ignorant — monstrous in her behaviour, flying out in all directions — calling people such names that I was forced lately to

make use of the term *Minx* — this is I think not from any innate vice, but from a penchant she has for acting stylishly. — I am however tired of such style and shall decline any more of it.'

After this portrait he sketches another of a certain Miss Robinson, who serves as a foil; dry, plain, playing the piano

'without one sensation but the feel of the ivory at her fingers.' And Fanny regarded this being as a 'Paragon of fashion, and says she is the only woman she would change persons with. What a stupe — she is superior as a Rose to a Dandelion.'

After this Keats made no more descriptions of Fanny. He told her, in one of his first letters, that he fell hopelessly in love with her within a week of meeting her. In almost all his letters he speaks of her physical beauty, as having been the first cause of his passion. In appearance, we are told, Fanny resembled the draped figure in Titian's picture 'Sacred and Profane Love.' Reynolds called her

'the poor idle Thing of Womankind to whom he has so unaccountedly attached himself.'

He attached himself to her for ever, and they became engaged — probably at Christmas that same year. There is reason to believe that he dined at the Brawnes', and secretly pledged himself to Fanny.

Three years later, in a letter, she spoke of that day as having been the happiest she had ever known.

§

The only indications we have to go upon with regard to the degree of physical beauty possessed by Fanny Brawne are this vague resemblance to a draped figure in a picture, and a silhouette cut by the French artist Edouart. We do not therefore know whether she really was beautiful. Of her nature, thanks to documentary evidence, especially that brought to light by Miss Amy Lowell, we know more.

To call her, as Reynolds did, a ' poor idle thing of Woman-kind ' is a little exaggerated. Reynolds's judgment must be taken with a grain of salt, influenced as he may have been by his sisters, who had a great regard for Keats, and may have felt themselves being ousted by this tiresome intruder. But it is only fair to add that all Keats's friends, including the Dilkes, friendly as they were with the Brawnes, regarded his passion, when they became aware of it, as a deplorable happening for the poet.

Fanny Brawne, at seventeen or eighteen was, quite simply, a very ' modern ' young person, whom it befell to have the unusual experience of being loved by a poet of genius, who was, into the bargain, a man of strong passions, already developing tuberculosis, depressed by events, and for all these reasons naturally susceptible to the force, the violence, the demands, the cruelties of the sensual passions.

Fanny Brawne was neither a well-educated woman, nor

a blue-stocking. She had a certain amount of natural taste, which must have been improved by contact with Keats. We do not know what she thought of *Endymion* and the *Poems*. Keats, in his letters to her, does not seem to have troubled about that. He asked of her something other than an understanding of his genius. In later years she tried her hand at a little writing herself. Her expressions of opinion on the subject of Shakespeare, Spenser and others show intelligence. And intelligence appears no less in her account of Keats's character. An idea got about, after the poet's death, of his having been of a violent nature. Thomas Medwin wrote to ask Fanny what truth there was in this suggestion. She replied:

> 'That his sensibility was most acute, is true, and his passions were very strong, but not violent, if by that term, violence of temper is implied. He was no doubt susceptible, but his anger seemed rather to turn on himself than on others, and in moments of greatest irritation, it was only by a sort of savage despondency that he sometimes grieved and wounded his friends. . . . For more than a twelve-month before quitting England, I saw him every day, often witnessed his sufferings, both mental and bodily, and I do not hesitate to say that he never could have addressed an unkind expression, much less a violent one, to any human being.'

She was neither ignorant nor foolish, but she had a great love of pleasure. One of her cousins, in a letter published in the *New York Herald,* of April 12th, 1889, describes her as

a pretty, unimportant little creature, running after men, especially soldiers, seeking to surround herself with strangers, and particularly Frenchmen, with whom she flirted in a language which Keats knew only in its literary aspect. The cousin is not very flattering about her; what does seem clear is that Fanny Brawne was insatiably fond of dancing, and like the rest of the world at that time, danced madly at every opportunity. There were balls at Hampstead, or at Woolwich, almost every evening.

Fanny hardly ever missed one of these gatherings, at which the officers, still surrounded by the glamour of Waterloo, were treated like kings. Fanny danced; Keats, feverish, with his persistent sore throat, haunted by the memories of his dead mother and brother, the one long dead, the other only just buried, who had been struck down by the disease which threatened even then his own life, sat picturing his beloved in transports, swinging round on the arm of a robust individual, uniformed, just returned from having roamed Europe, who could tell, between dances, stories as fine as they were terrible.

In his *Ode to Fanny* — which is a lament in verse of which the tone is already that of his most despairing letters — Keats begs the young girl:

'Ah! keep that hand unravished at the least;
Let, let the amorous burn —
But, prithee, do not turn
The current of your heart from me so soon.
. . . .

'Ah! if you prize my subdued soul above
The poor, the fading, brief pride of an hour;
Let none profane my Holy See of Love,
Or with a rude hand break
The sacramental cake;
Let none else touch the just new-budded flower;
If not — may my eyes close,
Love! on their lost repose.'

A little later he wrote to his sister a letter in which he says he would like her to teach him a 'few common dancing steps.' It is a pathetic and significant wish, and as revealing for the student of Keats's psychology, as that other phrase 'she is about my height.'

XIII

Some people follow the path of life side by side, now faster, now slower, making continual concessions, and so gaining more or less happiness; they call this loving, and the picture they make is a pathetic one. For others, loving consists of sacrificing themselves to the object of their affection, and holding themselves responsible for the wrongs which she inflicts upon them. Yet others demand everything, at no matter what price, of the loved one, and it was thus that Keats loved:

'you must be mine to die upon the rack if I want you.'

Meanwhile Dilke's father and a friend of his, Mr. Snook, invited Keats to spend a short time with them at Chichester, and then at Bedhampton; and Keats, in love, and indeed engaged, as he then was, left Hampstead and Fanny. There was no particular necessity for this parting, unless it was the necessity of persuading himself, by this act, that he was not yet too completely in her thrall, since he could still submit to the duties of politeness.

So he went. Fanny let him go. She had, after all, plenty of balls and flirtations to soften the pangs of absence.

During this absence at Chichester and Bedhampton, no letters passed between the two — that is to say, unless the letters have been lost or destroyed.

Keats had written lately the lines to *Fancy,* the *Robin Hood* piece, *Bards of passion and of mirth;* short pieces in which his inspiration caught something of Shelley, in a world where music, moonlight and thought were one.

He had not worked at *Hyperion.*

Setting aside his affair with Fanny, he was at a low ebb morally, physically and financially.

His sister's future was causing him a good deal of anxiety. Mr. Abbey had made some vague suggestion of removing her from school, and letting her complete her education in his own house.

Then his capital had been much diminished. As far as selling went, *Endymion* had had much the same fate as the *Poems.* Unless some unexpected success overtook him, or he found some definite employment, Keats could foresee the day when he would have only his share of his grandfather's fortune, which was at this time locked up owing to the Chancery suit. As a culmination, Haydon who was having trouble with his creditors, and was suffering with his eyes, beat him up — one can call it nothing else, and Haydon must have been perfectly aware of Keats's financial position — and in order to help the painter, Keats appealed to his publishers for a loan. At one time he had over £200 outstanding in the way of money borrowed from him.

But with his hosts Keats led the most peaceful existence in the world. Walks. Card-parties in the evening. Elderly, quiet provincial people. Kindly Mr. Snook offered to write out his own experience of farming for George's benefit.

While staying as Bedhampton, Keats went with Mr.

Snook to the consecration of a chapel built by a converted Jew. The attitude of the clergy increased the contempt he felt for the priestly office:

> 'A parson is a Lamb in a drawing-room, and a Lion in a vestry. . . . He is a hypocrite to the Believer and a coward to the unbeliever. He must be either a knave or an idiot. . . . The soldier who is cheated into an Esprit de Corps by a red coat, a band, and colours, for the purpose of nothing, is not half so pitiable as the parson who is led by the nose by the bench of bishops and is smothered in absurdities.'

This dislike of ecclesiastics, relic of Hunt's influence over him, expressed itself jokingly when, a short time after, he wrote to his sister, expressing his pleasure at hearing that she was on such good terms with

> 'Monsr. le Curé. Is he a nice clergyman? — a great deal depends upon a cock'd hat and powder — not gunpowder, lord love us, but lady-meal, violet-smooth, dainty-scented, lilly-white, feather-soft . . . coat-collar-spoiling, parson-sweetening powder.'

§

A calm existence. But Keats's soul was like those caves, those cathedrals in which every sound develops into a multitude of changing echoes. He brought back from Bedhampton half finished, and written on the thin paper given him by Haslam, his poem *The Eve of St. Agnes.*

Possibly on his arrival at Chichester on January 21st, one of the party may have welcomed him with the remark: 'You have come on St. Agnes' day.' The idea took the poet's fancy.

In the evening, tired with the shaking he had had in the coach, his head full of impressions of the countryside under the shades of night, his heart turning always to Fanny, he repeated to himself the words: 'St. Agnes' Eve.' The magic syllables recalled to him the quaint legend that if a young girl went to bed on the eve of St. Agnes' day fasting, her future husband would come to her in a vision at midnight. In the poem Madeline carries out the prescribed ceremonies; and at the appointed hour Porphyro appears before her. But he is no vision; it is her lover himself! He has dared the dwarfish Hildebrand who rules the land; grey-haired Lord Maurice; the watchfulness of the aged porter; and, thanks to the complicity of Angela, Madeline's old serving-woman, he gains the chamber of his beloved. He gazes on her, sings to her; Madeline opens her eyes, recognises Porphyro, and both flee through the night together.

As in *Endymion,* dream and reality intermingle; and the moon's enchantment suffuses the poem.

She does not shine here over sea and land, nor guide the steps of supernatural beings; she lights up the place where Porphyro, hidden in an embrasure of the wall, awaits the moment when he can steal into the castle, knowing that his daring may cost him his life. She lights up the chamber where Madeline lies on her couch,

'Full on this casement shone the wintry moon,
And threw warm gules on Madeline's fair breast,
As down she knelt for heaven's grace and boon;
Rose-bloom fell on her hands, together prest,
And on her silver cross soft amethyst,
And on her hair a glory like a saint:
She seem'd a splendid angel, newly drest,
Save wings, for heaven: Porphyro grew faint:
She knelt, so pure a thing, so free from mortal taint.'

The reality of the characters: Madeline, the old waiting-woman, Porphyro, the old porter, Lord Maurice, who never appears, but whose malign presence is felt, the still magic of the moon, and the legend itself, react perfectly one upon another. Mystery, truth, music, are achieved, from the technical standpoint, not by the use of an irregular metre, as in Coleridge's *Christabel,* but by the sure manipulation of the difficult Spenserian stanza.

Keats is not only telling a tale — as Hugo did in his small 'epics.' He adds to a description full of movement and richness a lyrical quality which is the voice of his soul.

Keats did not invent the exquisite legend. If he wrote without hesitation he owed nothing to Boccaccio, nor to Mrs. Radcliffe, nor to Brand's *Popular Antiquities,* but to 'Mrs. Jones's' suggestion, which, we have surmised, took the form of the greeting: 'You have come on St. Agnes' day,' which called up for him the old legend. . . .

From the same period dates the *Eve of St. Mark,* also based on a legend, that whoever, on the eve of St. Mark, placed

himself in the porch of a church at twilight, would see the spirits of those parishioners who were fated to fall seriously ill during the following year. If the apparitions remained within, that signified their death; if they came out, that prophesied their recovery; and accordingly as they stayed within a long or a short time, so would their illness be severe or mild. Rossetti suggested that Keats intended to make the story run in a way that should be applicable to his own case.

The poem sketched, coloured with exquisite art, consists of a few verses only, but fragment as it is, it bears unmistakably the mark of the masterpiece, let us repeat it once more: atmosphere. The atmosphere of a little town troubled by nothing, never to be troubled by anything, at the hour, most silent of all, when the pious, rosary or missal in hand, pass on softly shod feet to the church. The English Pre-Raphaelites, poets and painters, cherished this amazing fragment, too short for us to guess the course which the poem would have taken, which still more serves to heighten the mystery.

§

On his return to Hampstead, Keats, happy to be near Fanny, was to attain a height and a perfection unequalled in the history of literature, and to create for himself a realm in which he alone was king.

However, there were disappointments, and — those which touched him most deeply. His friend and confidant, the versatile Bailey, now holding a curacy, who had been paying

pronounced attentions to Marian Reynolds, suddenly broke off with regard to her, and became engaged to Miss Gleig. She was the daughter of a bishop, and no doubt Bailey saw where future advantage lay. He returned all Marian's letters to her, and abruptly demanded his own back.

Yet another disappointment — or, more justly, another crushing discovery about human nature. In going through Tom's papers, at Bentley's house, Keats came upon a set of love letters. They were very ardent, and were signed 'Amena.' Tom had never spoken to his brother of this affair. Inquiry revealed to Keats that the whole thing was a practical joke played by Wells on his dying friend.

These occurrences caused Keats intense pain.

Then on one occasion he heard a Mr. Lewis refer to him as being 'quite the little poet': Keats's comment, made no doubt with Byron in his mind, was: 'You see what it is to be under six foot and not a lord.'

He turned his affection to Reynolds, Brown, Dilke, his publishers, Rice, Haslam, his brother and sister-in-law. When writing to these last of Fanny Brawne, it is only to tell them of the petty quarrels which he has with her now and again — and even that little is smothered under the many and varied details which he gives them about his daily life, and his advice to them on different subjects.

If their experiment was succeeding less well than they had hoped, why should they not plant vines in America, and make wine. Lately, he had drunk claret, and congratulates himself on the fact.

'Now I like Claret, whenever I can have Claret I must drink it — 'tis the only palate affair that I am at all sensual in. Would it not be a good speck to send you some vine roots — could it be done? I'll enquire — if you could make some wine like Claret to drink on summer evenings in an arbour! For really 'tis so fine — it fills one's mouth with a gushing freshness — then goes down cool and feverless — then you do not feel it quarreling with your liver — no, it is rather a Peacemaker, and lies as quiet as it did in the grape; then, it is as fragrant as the Queen Bee, and the more ethereal Part of it mounts into the brain, not assaulting the cerebral apartments like a bully in a bad-house looking for his trull and hurrying from door to door bouncing against the wainscoat, but rather walks like Aladdin about his own enchanted palace so gently that you do not feel his step. Other wines of a heavy and spirituous nature transform a Man to a Silenus: this makes him a Hermes — and gives a Woman the soul and immortality of Ariadne, for whom Bacchus always kept a good cellar of Claret — and even of that he could never persuade her to take above two cups. I said this same Claret is the only palate-passion I have — I forgot game — I must plead guilty to the breast of a Partridge, the back of a hare, the backbone of a grouse, the wing and side of a Pheasant and a Woodcock *passim*. Talking of game (I wish I could make it), the Lady whom I met at Hastings and of whom I said something in my last I think has lately made me many presents of game, and enabled me to make as many.'

He kept up his interest in the literary world. With what joy did he not copy out the letter which Hazlitt, maltreated by the *Quarterly,* addressed to Gifford, the editor of that review:

> 'You say what you please of others; it is time you were told what you are. In doing this give me leave to borrow the familiarity of your style: for the fidelity of the picture I shall be answerable. You are a little person, but a considerable cat's paw; and so far worthy of notice. Your clandestine connection with persons high in office constantly influences your opinions and alone gives importance to them. You are the government critic, a character nicely differing from that of a government spy — the invisible link which connects literature with the Police.'

If Keats admired the great writer of the slip-shod appearance, the face and manners of a conspirator, for the depth of his taste, he admired him now no less for the courage which he displayed in attacking such an institution as the *Quarterly* and an individual so powerful as Gifford.

§

Brown these days was an amusing companion for Keats. He read him the fantastic story which he was engaged upon, of which the hero was the Devil, describing his affair with an old woman living in a forest. After various incidents the Devil

'himself falls in love with her, flies away with her to a desert place, in consequence of which she lays an infinite number of eggs — the eggs, being hatched from time to time, fill the world with many nuisances, such as John Knox, George Fox, Johanna Southcote, and Gifford.'

Keats's financial position grew steadily worse. Mr. Abbey informed him that he had very little money left. Poverty threatened the poet. He could not make up his mind as to what remunerative profession he should take up — whether to become a journalist, or to exercise his calling as a surgeon, and in order to succeed in this, to take up long and costly studies in Edinburgh; these seemed to him impossible solutions. He accused himself of carelessness, of idleness — but in reality it was nothing but disease, and the unconquerable obstacle of his temperament. It is as easy to imagine Balzac as an official, as Keats keeping a shop, or touting for custom. He reflected that after all, these difficulties were ones which he shared with the majority of men; he collected himself, tried to regain his balance, and his wish to do something good.

His dear sister-in-law Georgiana was not altogether happy over in America, amongst people with whom she had not much in common. In spite of her love for her husband, and her approaching motherhood, she was homesick for England. Keats tried to amuse her in his letters.

'Now you have by this time crumpled up your large Bonnet, what do you wear — a cap? Do you put your hair in papers of a night? do you pay the Miss Birkbecks

a morning visit — have you any tea? or do you milk-and-water with them — What place of Worship do you go to — the Quakers, the Moravians, the Unitarians, or the Methodists? Are there any flowers in bloom you like — any beautiful heaths — any streets full of Corset Makers? What sort of shoes have you to fit those pretty feet of yours? Do you desire Compliments to one another? Do you ride on Horseback? . . . Do you and Miss Birkbecks get groggy on anything — a little so-soish so as to be obliged to be seen home with a Lantern?'

He overwhelms her with ridiculous questions to which he begs an answer. He suggests to her for days of idleness or ill-humour fantastic ways of spending her time, in which the preparation of meals holds a large place.

'While you are hovering with your dinner in prospect you may do a thousand things — put a hedgehog into George's hat — pour a little water into his rifle — soak his boots in a pail of water — cut his jacket round into shreds like a Roman kilt or the back of my grandmother's stays — sew *off* his buttons.'

One Sunday, when going for a walk towards Highgate, he met one of his former professors from Guy's, in Coleridge's company. He stopped them deliberately — it was his first meeting with Coleridge, who, during a walk of about two miles, talked with his accustomed eloquence and garrulity, like a dreamer awakened, of a thousand subjects, a list of which Keats tried to give his brother.

'Nightingales, Poetry — on Poetical Sensation — Metaphysics — Different genera and species of Dreams — Nightmare — a dream accompanied with a sense of touch — single and double touch — a dream related — First and second consciousness — the difference explained between will and Volition — so many metaphysicians from a want of smoking the second consciousness — Monsters — the Kraken — Mermaids — Southey believes in them — Southey's belief too much diluted — a Ghost story — Good morning — I heard his voice as it came towards me — I heard it as he moved away — I heard it all the interval — if it may be called so.

All admirers of the 'sublime sleep-walker' will appreciate the sly malice of this picture.

Coleridge invited Keats to come and see him at Highgate. He pressed his hand at parting and, this pilgrim from the Beyond, this friend of ghosts, recorded afterwards in his Table Talk how he said to his companion: 'There is death in that hand.'

§

Thanks to the acuteness of his feelings, that is to say, of the intuitions of his spirit, Keats's intellectual growth was as rapid as his artistic progress, and he took account of it. The world was no more for him, as the Bible has it, a vale of tears. He calls it, in noble words, 'A Vale of Soul-Making.' These words come to his lips in that second chamber of the 'House of Life' where man 'originally a poor forked crea-

ture subject to the same mischances as the beasts of the forest,' pierces the mystery. Joys, sorrows, certainty of death — an overwhelming burden which bows him down, and which is only lightened first by knowledge, then by an acceptance of all things. These were the thoughts that the poetic genius of Keats brought to life, till they stood before him, like figures on a Greek vase.

> 'Suppose a rose to have sensation, it blooms on a beautiful morning, it enjoys itself, but then comes a cold wind, a hot sun — it cannot escape it, it cannot destroy its annoyances — they are as native to the world as itself: no more can man be happy in spite, the worldly elements will prey upon his nature.'

At the moment when he reached this philosophy of resignation, Keats was living intensely.

Dilke, completely swayed by his son, decided to take him to London. He went to settle in Westminster, and let his share of the house to the Brawnes. So now Keats and Fanny lived under the same roof, and saw each other at all hours of the day.

To his sister Keats wrote the most charming letters; she, too, was a person to be sustained, cheered, distracted, just as was Georgiana.

The child was not happy. Mr. Abbey wanted to take her away from school against her will, and exercised a very jealous supervision over her. The brother and sister were forbidden to meet, whether at Hampstead or at Walthamstow. They communicated with each other only by letter.

If Keats could not free his sister from the harsh care of the wholesale merchant, he could soften her captivity.

> 'On looking at your seal I cannot tell whether it is done or not with a Tassie — it seems to me to be paste. . . . Tell me if you have any or if you would like any — and whether you would rather have motto ones like that with which I seal this letter; or heads of great Men such as Shakespeare, Milton, etc., or fancy pieces of Art; such as Fame, Adonis, etc. — those gentry you read of at the end of the English Dictionary. Tell me also if you want any particular Book; or Pencils, or drawing-paper — anything but live stock. Though I will not now be very severe on it, remembering how fond I used to be of Goldfinches, Tomtits, Minnows, Mice, Ticklebacks, Dace, Cock salmons and all the whole tribe of the Bushes and the Brooks: but verily they are better in the Trees and the Water — though I must confess even now a partiality for a handsome Globe of gold-fish — then I would have it hold ten pails of water and be fed continually fresh through a cool pipe with another pipe to let through the floor — well ventilated they would preserve all their beautiful silver and Crimson.'

Sometimes, in his letters, he treats Fanny as if she were a grown-up person, and those letters in which there is question of money, or the attitude which she should adopt towards the Abbeys, we must conclude reached the child by a roundabout way, and by the help of her school-mistress.

To Fanny Brawne he confided his brotherly anxiety about his young sister. She was attached to Fanny Keats. She was only a few years older than the child. These sorrowful talks, during which Keats forgot his self-absorbed passion, and the presence of Brown, full of health and schemes, tempered the burning air which he breathed.

It was during these troubled months, so rich in fertile anxieties that this marvellous poet, in composing in a state of gracious enchantment, the *Belle Dame sans Merci,* and *Odes,* added notes hitherto undreamed of to the lyrical language of the world.

XIV

THERE is a phrase of Paul Claudel's which lets us more deeply into the soul and secret of Shakespeare than the pronouncements of more famous commentators. 'The finest thing about him,' he declares, 'is his Voices.' It is no less true of Keats.

And we must add the visions which they call up, their resonance, their subtle perfume, the magic which must conquer everyone who asks of poetry a complete subjugation of mind, heart, and senses. And they contain harmonies as cunningly blended as any in nature; themes developed in all the variations.

The inherent quality of the odes is not that of the diamond, white and cold, borrowing a reflected colour and fire from some external source of light, which makes it gleam by striking the facets into which it is cut. Their glowing perfection is rather like that of a pearl, which owes its lustre to itself alone, to the soft warmth of its form and texture.

There is a Keatsian ardour in lyric, just as we know, in painting, 'il fuoco giorgionesco.' The two artists have much in common. 'If poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree, it had better not come at all,' said Keats. By Poetry he did not mean the verbal gift, the power of writing verses, but that inspiration which cannot be forced by the will without disastrous results. Who can ever force the eagle to

leave or to return to the rocks of its eyrie? Who will dictate to the nightingale the hour at which she shall sing above her nest, whether it lie hidden at Verona, amongst the leaves of a pomegranate, or in the plum-tree that spread its branches before Fanny's window, in the garden at Wentworth place?

Exquisite song
'heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown.
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
The same that oft-times hath
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.'

The same song which now charmed the poet of the *Belle Dame sans Merci,* of the *Ode on Indolence, On Melancholy,* that company of beauty which dispute our favour; who begged

'for a draught of vintage! that hath been
Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth.
Tasting of Flora and the country green,
Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!
O for a beaker full of the warm South,
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple-stained mouth;
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
And with thee fade away into the forest dim.

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
What thou amongst the leaves hast never known,
The weariness, the fever, and the fret,
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last grey hairs,
Where youth grows pale and spectre-thin and dies;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs,
Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
Or new love pine at them beyond to-morrow.'

To die, whilst the immortal bird sings on over his grave for the generations yet to come, who, in their turn, will vanish away. . . .

Everything passes; Beauty alone remains, the law of the universe, Truth essential. That

'is all
Ye know, and all ye need on earth to know.'

It is the lesson which both the nightingale's song, and the figures on the Grecian urn have to teach us. Keats's deepest conviction was in the *Odes;* they were inspired by his truest, most profound instincts. His physical sensitiveness, which was so fine that he himself compared it to a snail's horn, there found expression. Whilst the nightingale sings

'I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
But in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
Wherewith the seasonable month endows,

The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
And mid-May's eldest child
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.'

Haydon insinuates that this extra sensitiveness was due to drink. The suggestion can be ignored. But the words fire, wings, wine are frequently on the poet's lips — wine, creator of joy, giver of oblivion.

§

Poetry and love had turned his mind away from material affairs, and now behold him abruptly face to face with a desperate situation.

Haydon was incessantly making pressing demands — commands, one might almost say — for money. The insane mystic, full of misfortunes, and in difficulties, but none the less a frenzied worker, and a firm believer in the sanctity of his mission, imposed upon him by God, expected his friend to be prepared to go to almost any length in order to help him.

The poet did not know where or how to try to raise money anew in order to help the painter. He could not ask Taylor again; he had already been over-generous, and although the poem had not succeeded, still valued *Endymion* highly.

Should he ask Abbey for an advance on his grandfather Jennings' estate? That would be madness. Abbey had no intention of putting himself out for his former ward. He was much too much a man of business not to be fully aware that the law-suit was bound to go on indefinitely, in view of the little means the Keats family had with which to finance it. Keats explained his situation to Haydon, frankly; and his own poverty soon reached such a point that he was compelled to ask the painter to repay the money which this last had borrowed. Relations between the two men became strained, and that entirely through the fault, the lack of delicacy, the lack of conscience of Haydon. Their friendship was a flame which died down and again flared up from time to time when the breath of unavoidable meeting fanned it, and brought Keats, on his part, some renewal of his former feeling.

But misfortune dogged him and his. The news from America was alarming. George had left the King of the Prairies; he had gone instead to Kentucky. There he had risked his small capital in a cargo boat which plied up and down the river. The boat went down, and he lost his money. This meant ruin. But cruel fate did not stop there. Mrs. Jennings, the widow of the naval officer, presumably because she was discontented with Abbey's methods, threatened a law-suit against the Jennings estate. She may have thought that she was acting in her nephew's interests; but the effect was to hold up everything, and make money harder than ever to come by, putting him still more at the mercy of the coffee merchant.

Keats, once more troubled by his throat, became desperate. He no longer contemplated going to Edinburgh to finish his studies in medicine. It had become necessary to earn a living as soon as possible. He therefore decided either to find some very cheap lodging in the country and write, or else to get a post as ship's doctor on board some Indiaman. This solution rather appealed to him because the time was drawing near when the methodical Brown would as usual let his house for the summer, pack his valise and knapsack, and go off for his change of air to the mountains or across the sea, or to be with his Abigail. The holiday of a literary epicurean, of which he described the pleasures — with the exception, of course, of those due to his mysterious mistress — in the evening, at the inn, after having laid out on the table first of all his paper, then his pens, last his bottle of ink.

Brown had the intelligent generosity of egoists of noble race, often more delicate and efficacious than the saintly disinterestedness of those who are solely tenderhearted. The malevolence of fate against Keats made him alarmed and indignant. A project of going with him to Belgium fell through. The state of health of the poet made great care necessary. Both Brown and Woodhouse disapproved of the Indiaman scheme; and Brown lent Keats the money he needed in order to be able to spend the summer, without worry, in the Isle of Wight, where Brown was to join him. He had suggested to Keats, who liked the idea, that they should write a play together. The subject was chosen: *Otho the Great, Emperor of Germany*. The plan was sketched. Keats wrote lines with Kean in his mind. The play was

intended for him. The part would certainly appeal to him; success could not fail. Whilst waiting for Brown's arrival, Keats was to spend his time thinking, reading plays over again, and enjoying the company of James Rice. Rice was ill, too, but an invalid who was very good company; that is to say in his capacity of gourmet, lover of life and good things, he fought, as far as possible, his depression, whether physical or moral, by opposing it to his inexhaustible spirits, good food and wine.

At the end of June Keats and Rice left for Shanklin.

XV

As dramatic criticism and poetry did not bring in enough to pay the expenses of setting up house, Reynolds had decided, now that he was engaged to be married, to go in for the law; he became an articled clerk in a lawyer's office. However, his work did not prevent him from writing, and he had just had a farce produced, called *One, Two, Three Four, Five,* which had had some success.

No doubt this success stimulated Keats's ambition, and when Brown suggested to him that they should collaborate in writing a play, he thought this would save the financial situation.

It was true that the idea of selling his pen to editors had disgusted him as much as, if not more than, the prospect of going in for medicine; but to acquire glory and money together quickly by means of the theatre, that is to say, not to pander to the public taste, but to train it, that was a magnificent adventure to attempt.

Brown was no novice. The success of his opera *Narevsky* had given him some fame in the theatrical world. He knew the ropes of the dramatic profession. To go into partnership with him was not in any way a loss of time; and the prospect of getting rich quickly and without chance of failure were the main factors in deciding Keats in favour of leaving Fanny and Hampstead to retire to the Isle of Wight.

Indeed, it seemed the only solution. Brown had let his house; he could not go and live with the Brawnes. Going back to Well Walk meant living in a stifling atmosphere, full of memories of Tom's illness and death, and the 'horrid row' of the little Bentleys. But it was equally difficult to seek other lodgings in Hampstead, since he was on excellent terms with his late landlord. In a small town, and for a man of letters, the postman is an important person, and to instal himself in other lodgings in the same neighbourhood would have been impossible without cruelly wounding this kindly disposed family. What alternative then was there to his accepting Brown's suggestion?

If Thomas Keats's son showed his good sense, Fanny Brawne did so no less. She let him leave for Shanklin, just as she had allowed him to go some months before, on the morrow of their secret engagement, to Bedhampton and Chichester. She had probably known Tom; she knew, no doubt, through Dr. Sawrey, that Keats was threatened, making a fight against the implacable disease which, for all his jealousy, kept him a prisoner by his fireside, whilst she went to dance and flirt.

She also knew Keats's straitened financial position. She herself was not rich, and respected her lover's independence and pride. She had not said to him, as Miss Drew perhaps had done to Reynolds: 'We must have money, if we are to have a home; you must work.' But she had understood that a theatrical success might perhaps save the situation; and she understood the poet's anxiety to succeed in a new field.

Was it in the interests of their love, their joint future, that

she allowed him to absent himself from her, and go with Brown? Or was her conduct perhaps dictated by a certain indifference, the desire to be relieved, for a time, of an exacting lover? Is one to conclude that she did not care very much for him, or that she was trying to induce in him a belief in his own powers which he lacked himself? To let him go, to advise him to this course, was it not, on the whole, treating him rather as a healthy being, and not as a man dying of love?

He left, then, for Shanklin, full of hopes on his own account, and for the success of *Otho*.

He describes the journey.

> 'There were on the Coach with me some common French people but very well behaved — there was a woman amongst them to whom the poor Men in ragged coats were more gallant than ever I saw gentlemen to Lady at a Ball. When we got down to walk up hill — one of them pick'd a rose, and on remounting gave it to the woman with "Ma'mselle voilà une belle rose!"'

There is a fragment called *Gripus* which is in all probability by Keats, and belonging to this period. No doubt he sketched it by way of getting his hand in, the small piece which has come down to us has little interest.

Keats was anxious to make a beginning at dramatic poetry. This eagerness to begin made him impatient of Rice's company, with regard to whom he had nothing to complain of except his ill-health. Keats wrote long after to Mrs. Brown:

'Severn now is a very good fellow but his nerves are too strong to be hurt by other people's illnesses — I remember poor Rice wore me in the same way in the Isle of Wight.'

Rice was a delightful person. Keats writes to his sister:

'He has a greater tact in speaking to people of the village than I have, and in those matters is a great amusement as well as good friend to me. He bought a ham the other day for says he, "Keats, I don't think a ham is a wrong thing to have in a house." '

But he was in ill-health, and the two invalids reacted on each other. After he had left, Keats wrote to Dilke:

'Rice and I passed rather a dull time of it. I hope he will not repent coming with me. He was unwell, and I was not in very good health; and I am afraid we made each other worse by acting upon each other's spirits.'

About the nineteenth of July, Brown arrived. But he had, rather disappointingly, brought with him a friend called Martin. They ate, they drank, they joked, they played cards; there could be no question of work as yet. At last Rice and Martin left Shanklin, and the two collaborators were alone together. Keats hoped to live over again the time at Oxford, when he had composed *Endymion* whilst living with Bailey; in fact he was also to endure hours of agony, the first blows of that fierce passion which his disease increased to a poison.

§

In the days of security when he was in the full flush of a radiant youth, and the centre of interest and admiration, he had asked himself whether he were not perhaps the plaything of fate, a 'pet lamb in a sentimental farce.' He was then a medical student going to Astley Cooper's lectures, enjoying the fun of his companions and sharing their life, conscious of his duty as head of a family, the friend of Hunt; and going to and fro between London and Hampstead he had composed, in all weathers, the poems which made up his first book. What admirable calm he displayed, this budding genius, in spite of all his agitations! It was in calmness that Keats wrote the greater part of *Endymion;* it was in calmness that he finished the poem at Box Hill; it was in calmness of the kind which the constant presence of the loved object creates for a passionate nature, that he had just produced the *Odes* and the *Belle Dame sans Merci.*

A man is master of his love passion. Vigny and Musset alike, fresh from betrayal, wrote, the one *Colère de Samson,* and the other *Les Nuits;* but there can be no such reaction before the death bed of a brother loved as if he were an only son — and that is why *Hyperion* remained hardly touched. . . .

To great artists, intensely harassed, a clear road is necessary. They need to surrender wholly to the thoughts of their minds, to the impulses of their hearts, and not to stop hesitatingly, doubting where they are to place their feet in order to move forward. It was in order to remain their own masters

that Brown and Keats arranged the way in which they spent their time: work in common, walks, talks, and freedom to attend each to his own affairs.

Dramatic work appealed to Keats. He was in a good mood. Working with Brown was like a festival. Of course, a tragedy on which such high hopes were founded was a serious undertaking; but the two writers enjoyed themselves. Work made them happy; Brown wanted to introduce an elephant into the play, but that they could find no evidence that Otho the Great ever owned such a creature.

Keats between whiles was reading Burton. In the *Anatomy of Melancholy* his imagination was roused by a passage in which the essayist talks of animals who put on human form.

> 'Philostratus, in his fourth book *de Vita Apollonii,* hath a memorable instance in this kind, which I may not omit, of one Menippus Lycius, a young man twenty-five years of age, that going betwixt Cenchreas and Corinth, met such a phantasm in the habit of a fair gentlewoman, which taking him by the hand, carried him home to her house, in the suburbs of Corinth, and told him she was a Phœnician by birth, and if he would tarry with her, he should hear her sing and play, and drink such wine as never any drank, and no man should molest him; but she, being fair and lovely, would live and die with him, that was fair and lovely to behold. The young man, a philosopher, otherwise staid and discreet, able to moderate his passions, though not this of love, tarried with her awhile, to his great content, and at last married her, to whose wedding,

amongst other guests, came Apollonius; who, by some probable conjectures, found her out to be a serpent, a lamia; and that all her furniture was, like Tantalus' gold, described by Homer, no substance but mere illusions. When she saw herself described, she wept, and desired Apollonius to be silent, but he would not be moved, and thereupon she, plate, house, and all that was in it, vanished in an instant: many thousands took notice of this fact, for it was done in the midst of Greece.'

The subject fascinated Keats, since it corresponded with his own state of mind, in which dream and reality were no longer intermingled. He began *Lamia;* and did not neglect his correspondence. He showed an extraordinary activity and diversity of intellectual activity at this time.

His letters to his sister are charming; those to his friends serious, full of his work and the questions which he was revolving, both moral and artistic. To Dilke, continually worried about his son, he gives wise advice on the subject of education; only in his letters to Fanny Brawne do we get a glimpse of Keats as he was at this time at the bottom of his being.

We have a picture of him too as he appeared at this time, the portrait by Brown. The history of this portrait is odd; it was a pencil drawing by Brown, and lost for a while. Towards the end of last century it was found and sent to Sir Sidney Colvin by the amateur painter's grand-daughter, living in New Zealand. Proof was forthcoming of the authenticity of this vivid piece of work.

§

Hardly was he installed at Shanklin, than Keats wrote to Fanny Brawne. These letters are in a tone of deliberate tenderness; a warmth of passion which the fever of jealousy did not as yet weaken:

'I am glad I had not an opportunity of sending off a Letter which I wrote for you on Tuesday night — 'twas too much like one out of Rousseau's *Héloïse*. I am more reasonable this morning. The morning is the only proper time for me to write to a beautiful Girl whom I love so much; for at night, when the lonely day has closed, and the lonely, silent, unmusical chamber is waiting to receive me as into a Sepulchre, then believe me my passion gets entirely the sway, then I would not have you see those Rhapsodies which I once thought it impossible I should ever give way to, and which I have often laughed at in another, for fear you should think me either too unhappy or perhaps a little mad. I am now at a very pleasant Cottage window, looking into a beautiful hilly country, with a glimpse of the sea; the morning is very fine. I do not know how elastic my spirit might be, what pleasure I might have in living here, and breathing and wandering as free as a stag about this beautiful Coast if the remembrance of you did not weigh so upon me. I have never known any unalloy'd Happiness for many days together: the death or sickness of some one has always spoilt my hours — and now when none such troubles oppress me, it is, you must confess, very hard that another sort of pain should haunt

me. Ask yourself, my love, whether you are not very cruel to have so entrammelled me, so destroyed me.

'Will you confess this in the Letter you must write immediately and do all you can to console me in it — make it as rich as a draught of poppies to intoxicate me — write the softest words and kiss them that I may at least touch my lips where yours have been. For myself I know not how to express my devotion to so fair a form: I want a brighter word than bright, a fairer word than fair. I almost wish we were butterflies and liv'd but three summer days — three such days with you I could fill with more delight than fifty common years could ever contain. . . . Indeed if I thought you felt as much for me as I do for you at this moment I do not think I could restrain myself from seeing you again to-morrow for the delight of one embrace. But no — I must live upon hope and chance. In case of the worst that can happen, I shall still love you — but what hatred shall I have for another!'

Brown had to be away for a few days, and this absence forced Keats to be half idle. His feelings clarified; his longing for Fanny increased as the days went by.

'Your letter gave me more delight than any thing in the world but yourself could do; indeed I am almost astonished that any absent one should have that luxurious power over my senses which I feel. Even when I am not thinking of you I receive your influence and a tender nature stealing upon me. All my thoughts, my unhappiest days and nights, have I find not at all cured me

of my love of Beauty, but made it so intense that I am miserable that you are not with me: or rather breathe in that dull sort of patience that cannot be called Life. I never knew before, what such a love as you have made me feel, was; I did not believe in it; my Fancy was afraid of it, lest it should burn me up. But if you will fully love me, though there may be some fire, 'twill not be more than we can bear when moistened and bedewed with Pleasures. You mention "horrid people" and ask me whether it depend upon them whether I see you again. Do understand me, my love, in this. I have so much of you in my heart that I must turn Mentor when I see a chance of harm befalling you. I would never see anything but Pleasure in your eyes, love on your lips, and Happiness in your steps. I would wish to see you among those amusements suitable to your inclinations and spirits; so that our loves might be a delight in the midst of Pleasures agreeable enough, rather than a resource from vexation and cares. But I doubt much, in case of the worst, whether I shall be philosopher enough to follow my own Lessons: if I saw my resolution give you a pain I could not. Why may I not speak of your Beauty since without that I could never have lov'd you? — I cannot conceive any beginning of such love as I have for you but Beauty. There may be a sort of love for which, without the least sneer at it, I have the highest respect and can admire it in others: but it has not the richness, the bloom, the full form, the enchantment of love after my own heart. So let me speak of your Beauty, though to my own endangering; if you could be so cruel

to me as to try elsewhere its Power. Afraid I shall think you do not love me — in saying this you make me ache the more to be near you. I am at the diligent use of my faculties here, I do not pass a day without sprawling some blank verse or tagging.'

And again:

'I have been in so irritable a state of health these two or three last days, that I did not think I should be able to write this week. Not that I was so ill, but so much so as only to be capable of an unhealthy teasing letter. To-night I am greatly recovered only to feel the languor I have felt after you touched with ardency. You say you perhaps might have made me better: you would then have made me worse; now you could quite effect a cure. . . . Do not call it folly, when I tell you I took your letter last night to bed with me. In the morning I found your name on the sealing wax obliterated. I was startled at the bad omen till I recollected that it must have happened in my dreams, and they you know fall out by contraries. You must have found out by this time I am a little given to bode ill like the raven; it is my misfortune not my fault; it has proceeded from the general tenor of the circumstances of my life, and rendered every event suspicious. . . . I am afraid you have been unwell. If through me illness have touched you (but it must be with a very gentle hand) I must be selfish enough to feel a little glad at it. Will you forgive me this? . . . When I have to take my candle and retire to a lonely room, without the thought, as I fall asleep, of

seeing you to-morrow morning or the next day, or the next — it takes on the appearance of impossibility and eternity. . . . '

Brown's return spurred him on. He no longer wrote to Fanny as often as she had asked him to do. He excused himself, made a plea of interminable card-parties; the composing of difficult lines and his mad passion. He confessed that he was roaming the country-side and added:

'I have, believe me, not been an age in letting you take possession of me; the very first week I knew you I wrote myself your vassal; but burnt the Letter as the very next time I saw you I thought you manifested some dislike to me. If you should ever feel for Man at the first sight that I did for you, I am lost.'

This cry from the heart shows that Fanny did not love Keats as he loved her. She loved him with moderation, with a normal affection, but all the time she retained her taste for flirtation, dancing, gaiety; and it was this tempered love, this desire for pleasure, that frightened Keats.

To his brothers who had compared him to Byron Keats had said that whereas Byron wrote of what he saw he himself wrote of what he imagined. He *felt* all that he imagined, and this power, essential to the artist but disastrous to the man, could not fail to produce in Keats the most terrible agony.

But in this summer of 1819 he was too newly blinded by love to reach the utmost extremity of suffering.

'You are, I love you; all I can bring you is a swooning admiration of your Beauty . . . I have two luxuries to brood over in my walks, your loveliness and the hour of my death. O that I could have possession of them both in the same minute. I hate the world: it batters too much the wings of my self-will, and would I could take a sweet poison from your lips to send me out of it. From no others would I take it. I am indeed astonish'd to find myself so careless of all charms but yours — remembering as I do when even a bit of riband was a matter of interest with me. What softer words can I find for you after this — what it is I will not read. Nor will I say more here, but in a Postscript answer anything else you may have mentioned in your Letter in so many words — for I am distracted with a thousand thoughts. I will imagine you a Venus to-night and pray, pray, pray to your star like a Heathen.'

Soon after he wrote her an extraordinary letter. He told Fanny that, owing to the scarcity of books there, he and Brown were leaving Shanklin for Winchester, where he was to remain alone for a fortnight. He proposed to leave his work and run up to town to see his beloved. He informed her, however, that he could only stay a short time with her; he was in the mood for writing, and he was afraid of being distracted from his work! However, he did not carry out this suggestion; for he was at once eager and afraid to see Fanny, to hear her voice, to breathe her atmosphere.

One idea haunted him; to get away from Shanklin. He felt a hatred for its name, its pebbles, the very

> ' posts there — the voice of the old Lady over the way was getting a great Plague. The Fisherman's face never altered any more than our black teapot — the knob however was knocked off to my little relief.'

Soon his irritability became such that he could not bear the sight of certain people. Writing was a torture to him. He begged that during his next absence no letters should be expected of him.

§

His seven weeks at Shanklin had been fertile enough; half of his amazing *Lamia,* four acts of *Otho the Great* had been written. Brown seems to have wearied of his share in the work; Keats finished it without the aid of his collaborator.

At Winchester it turned out that there was, after all, no library. But this disappointment was comparatively small compared to the other blow that fell: Kean left England to tour America. For the time being the hope of seeing *Otho* produced was over. There could be no hope of success with the Covent Garden Management; they would be bound to refuse the piece. Keats was only a beginner in their eyes; as for Brown, such success as he had had was very ephemeral.

He describes his disappointments, his set-backs so firmly faced, to George and Georgiana — but never a word to them of Fanny Brawne.

'Whenever I find myself growing vapourish, I rouse myself, wash, and put on a clean shirt, brush my hair and clothes, tie my shoe-strings neatly, and in fact adonise as I were going out. Then, all clean and comfortable, I sit down to write. This I find the greatest relief. Besides, I am becoming accustomed to the privations of the pleasures of sense. In the midst of the world I live like a hermit. I have forgotten how to lay plans for the enjoyment of any pleasure. I feel I can bear anything — any misery, even imprisonment, so long as I have neither wife nor child.'

This longing for a home of his own always brings him back to Fanny Brawne.

His first letters, as has been seen, were passionate, homesick. The accessions of passion had been repressed. This passionate feeling had turned to intense longing — and now his letters had touches of cruelty and sarcasm. They were scorched with the fire of his heart.

'What shall I say for myself? I have been here four days and not yet written you — 'tis true I have had many teasing letters of business to dismiss — and I have been in the Claws, like a serpent in an Eagle's, of the last act of our Tragedy. This is no excuse; I know it; I do not presume to offer it. I have no right either to ask a speedy answer to let me know how lenient you are — I must remain some days in a Mist — I see you through a Mist: as I daresay you do me by this time. Believe in the first

Letters I wrote you: I assure you I felt as I wrote — I could not write so now. The thousand images I have had pass through my brain — my uneasy spirits — my unguess'd fate — all spread as a veil between me and you. Remember I have had no idle leisure to brood over you — 'tis well perhaps I have not. I could not have endured the throng of jealousies that used to haunt me before I had plunged so deep into imaginary interests. I would fain, as my sails are set, sail on without an interruption for a Brace of Months longer — I am in complete cue — in the fever; and shall in these four Months do an immense deal. This Page as my eye skims over it I see is excessively unloverlike and ungallant — I cannot help it — I am no officer in yawning quarters; no Parson-romeo. My Mind is heap'd to the full; stuff'd like a cricket ball — if I strive to fill it more it would burst. I know the generality of women would hate me for this; that I should have so unsoften'd, so hard a Mind as to forget them; forget the brightest realities for the dull imaginations of my own Brain. But I conjure you to give it a fair thinking; and ask yourself where 'tis not better to explain my feelings to you, than write artificial Passion. — Besides, you would see through it. It would be vain to strive to deceive you. 'Tis harsh, harsh, I know it. My heart seems now made of iron — I could not write a proper answer to an invitation to Idalia. You are my Judge: my forehead is on the ground. You seem offended at a little simple childish innocent playfulness in my last. I did not seriously mean to say that you were endeavouring to make me keep my

promise. I beg your pardon for it. . . . You say I may do as I please — I do not think with any conscience I can; my cash resources are for the present stopp'd; I fear for some time. I spend no money, but it increases my debts. I have all my life thought very little of these matters — they seem not to belong to me. It may be a proud sentence; but by Heaven I am as entirely above all matters of interest as the Sun is above the Earth — and though of my own money I should be careless; of my Friends' I must be spare. You see how I go on — like so many strokes of a hammer. I cannot help it — I am impell'd, driven to it. I am not happy enough for silken Phrases, and silver sentences. I can no more use soothing words to you than if I were at this moment engaged in a charge of Cavalry. Then you will say I should not write at all. — Should I not? . . . The little coffin of a room at Shanklin is changed for a large room, where I can promenade at my pleasure — looks out onto a beautiful — blank side of a house. It is strange I should like it better than the view of the sea from our window at Shanklin.'

This jar of honey poured out, he describes the Cowes regatta, and ends:

'Forgive me for this flint-worded Letter and believe and see that I cannot think of you without some sort of energy — though mal à propos. Even as I leave off it seems to me that a few more moments' thought of you would uncrystallise and dissolve me. I must not give way to it — but turn to my writing again — if I fail I shall die

hard. O my love, your lips are growing sweet again to my fancy — I must forget them.'

§

George's financial ruin was now a matter of fact. Only one hope remained: an appeal to Mr. Abbey. Keats left post haste for London. But the coffee merchant, who was about to retire, could do nothing; Tom's money was there, but Fanny was still a minor.

Despair. Idleness. Keats prowled about London as if it were some old unfamiliar town. There was not one house which he could enter with any pleasure. His friends — Dilke, and Reynolds — were away, either travelling or in the country.

However, Rice was there. They had not met since they were at Shanklin together. They saw each other again now with great delight. Keats, with time on his hands, went to chat and discuss things in general with his publishers: the man of letters was by no means dead in him. Taylor and Hessey, in spite of the complete lack of success of *Endymion,* were still ready to publish a new book for Keats. Woodhouse wanted to take him to France for a 'poetical trip' the following year; alas, when that time came Keats was already at the fourth of his twelve months of 'posthumous existence.'

He describes his meeting with Mr. Abbey:

'When I left Mr. Abbey on Monday evening, I walked up Cheapside, but returned to put some letters in the post,

and met him again in Bucklesbury. We walked together through the Poultry as far as the baker's shop he has some concern in. — He spoke of it in such a way to me, I thought he wanted me to make an offer to assist him in it. I do believe if I could be a hatter I might be one. He seems anxious about me. He began blowing up Lord Byron while I was sitting with him: "However, may be the fellow says true now and then," at which he took up a magazine, and read me some extracts from *Don Juan* (Lord Byron's last flash poem) and particularly one against literary ambition.'

It can be imagined how this astonishing conversation and the last little touch amused Keats. Haslam amused him too; for Haslam was in love, and did not try to hide it, but showed Keats a picture of his lady love. Keats looked, listened, and smiled inwardly.

'A man in love,' he writes to George, 'I do think cuts the sorriest figure in the world; queer, when I know a poor fool to be really in pain about it, I could burst out laughing in his face. . . . Not that I take Haslam as a pattern for lovers; he is a very worthy man and a good friend. His love is very amusing.'

To support his opinion he copies out into his letter a sparkling piece from the *Anatomy of Melancholy* about those beings who have no dearer pastime than to conjugate the verb 'to love' — and, meanwhile, after having vaguely indicated to Fanny his financial embarrassments, he writes to her:

'If I were to see you to-day it would destroy the half comfortable sullenness I enjoy at present into downright perplexities. I love you too much to venture to Hampstead. I feel it is not paying a visit, but venturing into a fire. . . . I am a Coward, I cannot bear the pain of being happy: 'tis out of the question: I must admit no thought of it.'

And instead of going to Wentworth Place to see his beloved, he hastened to take refuge at Winchester with Brown. The latter had just come back from Bedhampton and Chichester; but he had also, unknown to Keats, been over to Ireland, and contracted his illegal marriage with Abigail Donohue.

Keats's tragic situation — physical, financial, moral — troubled his friends. Haslam and his publishers came to his help.

§

Once back at Winchester, a feeling of well-being, of relief, came over Keats. The little town pleased him. The population was in a state of excitement over the election of the mayor; Brown assisted; Keats remained a spectator. The comedy amused him, and describing its incidents was a tonic to him.

And now he found anew the serene inspiration of the *Nightingale,* the *Grecian Urn, Melancholy,* in the *Ode to Autumn* — descriptive if you will, but in the same manner as are the *Pastoral Symphony* and the *Gardens of Eros* in Franck's *Psyche.*

The study of Dryden, Chaucer, the Elizabethans, Chatterton — the purest writer of English, as he thought — finally caused him definitely to abandon *Hyperion*. There were 'too many Miltonic inversions in it,' he tells Reynolds. In his opinion the latinisms of *Paradise Lost* had corrupted the language. Coleridge admired Milton for his delicately artifical syle. Keats on the contrary, writing to his friend says:

> 'Miltonic verse cannot be written but in an artful, or, rather, artist's humour. I wish to give myself up to other sensations. English ought to be kept up. It may be interesting to you to pick out some lines from Hyperion and put a mark × to the false beauty proceeding from art, and one // to the true voice of feeling.'

Keats had been engaged on *Hyperion* for a long time. He had begun working on it after his trip to Scotland, when he was still full of the impressions made on him by the scenery of the solitudes and mountains amongst which before his watchful eyes the vision of the dethroned Titans appeared, when in his ears there still echoed the sound of storm and sea; but under what tragic conditions was he writing! Ill, watching and looking after his dying brother.

After Tom's death Keats brooded over *Hyperion;* he could not get away from it.

The man who, in order to explain his philosophical ideas, had invented the symbolism of the House of Life, the burden of the mystery, the valley of soul-making, heard in the speech of Oceanus to the vanquished Titans, who were not,

like himself, resigned, the voice of true feeling. Light had overthrown Chaos and Darkness. Saturn in turn was dethroned by more harmonious deities, who would in turn lose their sceptres, since an eternal law of the universe demands that the most beautiful shall also be the most powerful. This was the fruit of Oceanus's meditations in his undersea caverns. He had seen the god who should dethrone him

> 'on the calmed waters scud
> With such a glow of beauty in his eyes,
> That it enforc'd me to bid sad farewell
> To all my empire; farewell sad I took
> And hither came, to see how dolorous fate
> Had wrought upon ye; and how I might best
> Give consolation in this woe extreme.
> Receive the truth, and let it be your balm.'

This first *Hyperion* Keats broke off: he had begun the poem with one idea in his mind; as he wrote that idea developed into something of which he had been only vaguely aware, and crystallised. That idea made it impossible for him to carry out his original intention. He began again; the second *Hyperion — The Fall of Hyperion: a Dream* — was an attempt to recast the whole poem in order to express the idea which was now clear to him. He abandoned it, as he explained to Reynolds, 'because there were too many Miltonic inversions in it — Miltonic verse cannot be written but in an artful, or, rather, artist's humour.' Or, as Mr. Middleton Murry has put it: 'He was trying to

utter in the abstract, what can only be revealed in the concrete.' The Miltonic manner and approach were foreign to Keats, and when he realised this, he abandoned it.

The influence of Milton is undeniable, but there are in *Hyperion* passages and lines whose musical fullness and grandeur Milton never surpassed; and there are others of a dramatic force, a conciseness, a content which he never equalled. Keats was truly himself there.

§

Byron, on reading *Hyperion,* exclaimed that it seemed directly inspired by the Titans. And he was no lover of Keats. Did he not invite his publisher, Murray, to

'flay him alive — if not I must skin him myself'?

But the poet of *Manfred,* who was to write *Cain* and *Heaven and Earth,* could not fail to recognise in the writer of *Hyperion* a brother in genius.

Shelley said of Keats: 'he *was* a Greek.' Himself a Hellenist, translator of the *Banquet,* author of *Prometheus,* Shelley had understood the spirit of the poem, and realised that platonic conception of Beauty which is the spirit of Keats's work. But we have no evidence that Keats had studied the *Dialogues.* What he knew of them came, no doubt, from conversations with Bailey and Haydon; that was ample for him, to teach him to wander

'ere eve's star appeared
. . . where reason fades,
In the calm twilight of Platonic shades'

in the company of Lycius, the hero of *Lamia.*

'*Hyperion* . . . is an astonishing piece of writing, and gives me a conception of Keats which I confess I had not had before,' said Shelley. He adds, alas, that the rest of the volume containing it is 'insignificant enough' — and that collection contained *Lamia, Isabella, The Odes, The Eve of St. Agnes!* However, it was this volume that was found in Shelley's pockets, when the storm that engulfed the *Ariel* and her crew threw up on the Italian sands the poet's body, of which the flames of the funeral pyre could not consume the heart.

XVI

The financial problem took the foremost place amongst the matters with which Keats was preoccupied at this time.

However, there was some hope that *Otho* would be produced at Drury Lane the following season. The manager gave a vague promise about it. Keats learned now that the sublime vocation of the poet is none the less a commonplace trade, and that a poverty-stricken dramatist, with neither cunning nor influence, has done nothing for his play when he has put the word ' finis ' on the last page of his manuscript.

He was weary of living on borrowed money and illusions. He wanted to earn money for himself and in order to help George and Georgiana, and he could only succeed in doing this by the help of his pen, and by living in London. And, on the whole, his recollections of the time when he had tried his hand at dramatic criticism for the *Chronicle* were not unpleasant.

Barely two years had passed since then — but what centuries he had lived through. In those days the pantomime, the farce, had served to amuse him in passing. He had been interested in going behind the scenes, amongst the scene-shifters, the scenery, the actors, the pretty creatures in fanciful attire. His pen passed easily from gay to grave, and his pen dealt equal justice to Kean's acting, and the frolics of

Columbine, the pirouettings of Harlequin, and the tears of Pierrot — he would take up the part of dramatic critic once more.

Brown — who occupied his leisure in copying out *Otho* in superb style, and looking up old Mr. Dilke at Chichester, and probably Abigail in Ireland — approved of Keats's determination; Keats's letters to him on the subject are really pathetic. He feared that those who cared for him, and who helped him morally and materially would realise his distraught state of mind. He begged Dilke to find him

> 'a couple of rooms (a Sitting Room and bed room for myself alone) in Westminster. Quietness and cheapness are the essentials.'

Cheapness — soon the small expense of the move prevented his being able to find the coach-hire to go to see his sister at Walthamstow.

He dreamed of epic works, of national drama, and read Holinshed. Brown supplied him with a subject for a new tragedy taken from English history: *King Stephen.* Keats wrote four scenes of this which, by their style, their vitality, their intensity, leave far behind the five acts of *Otho.* Had this play of *King Stephen* been finished, the English drama of the nineteenth century could have shown, along with the *Cenci,* two plays worthy of the Elizabethans.

Keats's activity did not end there. He gives full rein to his ardour, always abounding, and wakeful. Certain passages of his most restless, agonised letters bear witness to this.

He set to work on an immense piece, which he intended

to sign with a pseudonym, and in which he was to see whether he could equal the virtuosity, the sprightliness, the biting satire of Byron and Ariosto. He succeeded, to some extent. *Cap and Bells or The Jealousies* presents both imaginary characters and contemporary figures, thinly disguised — the Prince Regent and his wife, for example; London cabs rub shoulders with magic vapours. Lyricism, satire, fancy, humour cleverly intermingled build up the stanzas, carve out the lines. The admirers of the *Odes* and of the *Eve of St. Agnes* do not appreciate this lapse on the part of a man of genius. But such as it is, it shows the variety, the suppleness of Keats's marvellous poetic gift.

When Dilke let him know that he had found rooms, not far from himself, at 25 College Street, Westminster, the poet packed up his luggage, left Winchester and went to take possession of his new home. He changed his diet, and left off animal food 'that my brains may never henceforth be in a greater mist than is theirs by nature.'

His mind full of the most varied projects, determined to stabilise his life, and clear himself of debt, eager to help his family, absorbed in his love, his head was, as he wrote to Fanny 'as full as a cricket-ball.' Writing to his brother and sister-in-law he told them that he had a black eye, due to a hard knock from a cricket ball. Keats, born writer as he was, at once found in the incident the image he needed.

§

Established in London he had a visit from Severn, who reproached him for not going on with *Hyperion*. Every-

thing in the poem, its style, its inspiration, was calculated to appeal to the painter, but Keats's decision was irrevocable.

He went to Hampstead; he saw Fanny, one day only. Everything faded into the background. It was a man struck by lightning who returned to London. The truth had become clear to him; for him there was no one but Fanny in the world.

> 'I am living to-day in yesterday; I was in a complete fascination all day. I feel myself at your mercy. Write me ever so few lines and tell me you will never for ever be less kind to me than yesterday. — You dazzled me. There is nothing in the world so bright and delicate. . . . When shall we pass a day alone. I have had a thousand kisses, for which with my whole soul I thank love — but if you should deny me the thousand and first — 'twould put me to the proof how great a misery I could live through. If you should ever carry your threat yesterday into execucution — believe me 'tis not my pride, my vanity or any petty passion would torment me — really 'twould hurt my heart — I could not bear it. . . . Ah herté mine.'

What threat was this? We have no letter of Fanny's to make it clear. But it is beyond doubt, nevertheless, that storms of passion troubled the relations between Fanny and Keats, and that he was far from being one of those knights of old whose love could subsist on cold water and smiles.

In London he led the life of a being bewitched. Everything urged the necessity of health, strength, power to earn money. A ghastly certainty crushed him down: in the great

heedless city, given over to labour, full of rumours, he would never do anything, he would never be anything, as for a moment he had madly hoped.

An eagle struck down in full flight, he sought in vain, from rock to rock, some sheltering spot where he might rest, and fold his tired wings to await recovery or death.

He could not stay in that place. He could not bear his solitary room where there appeared before him no mighty visions of epic grandeur, but the forms, growing clearer and clearer, of his mother and Tom.

His pen was torn from his hand; that hand, sovereign of one of the fairest realms of Poetry, lay lifeless on his table, as, upon the rock, had lain the hand of Saturn, dethroned, with neither crown nor sceptre. His life had turned to tears — tears such as no human being had ever shed — tears of blood:

'This moment I have set myself to copy some verses out fair. I cannot proceed with any degree of content. I must write you a line or two and see if that will assist in dismissing you from my Mind for ever so short a time. Upon my Soul I can think of nothing else. The time is passed when I had power to advise and warn you against the unpromising morning of my Life. My love has made me selfish. I cannot exist without you. I am forgetful of everything but seeing you again — my Life seems to stop there. — I see no further. You have absorbed me. I have a sensation at the present moment as though I was dissolving — I should be exquisitely miserable without the hope of soon

seeing you. I should be afraid to separate myself from you. My sweet Fanny will your heart never change? My love, will it? I have no limit now to my love. . . . Your note came in just here. I cannot be happier away from you. 'Tis richer than an Argosy of Pearls. Do not threat me even in jest. I have been astonished that Men could die Martyrs for religion — I have shuddered at it. I shudder no more — I could be martyr'd for my Religion — Love is my religion — I could die for that. I could die for you. My Creed is Love and you are its only tenet. You have ravish'd me away by a Power I cannot resist; and yet I could resist till I saw you; and even since I have seen you I have endeavoured often "to reason against the reasons of my Love." I can do that no more — the pain would be too great. My love is selfish. I cannot breathe without you.'

§

Fanny had certainly played the flirt in her letters, and also in her personal relations with Keats, probably no more, and no less, than with her dancing partners. Why could she not take the poet seriously? But she saw the evil results of her light behaviour on so rare and sensitive a nature as her lover's. The sight of such a depression startled her, roused her pity, and, after all, lessened her love. Keats intuitively felt this change. He was too worn out to suffer much; too wild about her to feel humiliated.

He spent three days at Hampstead. Three 'dream days' which passed in the melancholy autumnal weather. The air

was hazy; early rains refreshed the turf-plots in the gardens where the October roses were in bloom. The trees began to lose their dry leaves, and the robins, leaving the woods, came to ask for their daily bread at the hands of men, and to sing in front of their houses.

Three dream days which made the great desert of grey houses and incessant noise of London more ghostly to him than ever; his lonely room more desolate. He gave up his rooms in College Street, and stayed a few days with the Dilkes. From their pleasant house — they were close friends of the Brawnes — he wrote to Fanny:

> 'On awakening from my three days dream ("I cry to dream again") I find one and another astonish'd at my idleness and thoughtlessness. I was miserable last night — the morning is always restorative. I must be busy or try to be so. Mrs. Dilke I should think will tell you that I purpose living at Hampstead. I must impose chains upon myself. I shall be able to do nothing. I should like to cast the die for love or death. I have no Patience with any thing else — if you ever intend to be cruel to me as you say in jest now but perhaps may sometimes be in earnest, be so now — and I will. . . .'

It is easy to guess Keats's thought, to finish the sentence. The idea of suicide seized him, presented itself as the only means of putting an end to his physical and moral suffering, of putting an end manfully to a hopeless existence.

He was restless, depressed. It was autumn, and the days

were short, the cold wind blew over the Heath, and Keats, we know, was always profoundly under the influence of the seasons, associating with each definite feelings, colours, the names of certain poets.

He worked, little and badly, at his heroical-comic poem, at his play. He wrote no letters; and, at last, giving up his plans, his main-spring broken, went back to Hampstead to live near Fanny with Brown, who did not understand, or pretended not to understand, the collapse of his friend.

Brown kept his own secrets; Keats, his. By a tacit agreement between them dating from the day they had set up house together, neither had urged the confidence of the other. Brown, instead of questioning Keats, strongly urged him, since at Hampstead he was in a calm and sympathetic atmosphere, to work at *King Stephen* and the *Cap and Bells,* and not to give up hope of seeing *Otho the Great* yet produced on the stage at Drury Lane or Covent Garden.

§

Suddenly, in that solitude, the grandeur of epic forms rose before him again. His conquered Titans reappeared, grouped round about Saturn. There they were, the creations of his mind:

> 'Creus was one; his ponderous iron mace
> Lay by him, and a shatter'd rib of rock
> Told of his rage, ere he thus sank and pined.
> . . . Next Cottus: prone he lay, chin uppermost,

As though in pain; for still upon the flint
He ground severe his skull, with open mouth
And eyes at horrid working . . .
on a crag's uneasy shelve,
Upon his elbow rais'd, all prostrate else,
Shadow'd Enceladus; once tame and mild. . . .
. . . Neighbour'd close
Oceanus, and Tethys, in whose lap
Sobb'd Clymene among her tangled hair.
In midst of all lay Themis, at the feet
Of Ops the queen all clouded round from sight.'

A group in bronze: dull, but burnished where the Titan of the Sun arose: Hyperion, always lord of an empire of flame which threatened the shadows.

Keats had broken the bronze of that group, and melted down the ingots of metal at the foundry; the mould burst under the action of the too fierce fire. The work which resulted was a rough sketch, on the grand scale, of which there are parts whose beauty reaches mysterious heights.

Now, at the end of 1819, Keats took it up again, and worked on it, no doubt in an attempt to shape it for his forthcoming book.

The story of the second *Hyperion* is in the form of a lyrical or dramatic vision:

The poet finds himself in a vast Eden, where the joys of youth and the world, tasted by others before him, appear before his eyes in a symbolic manner, under the form of

trees, flowers, and fruit of all climates. It is a banquet which nature offers the poet. He breathes the perfumes, and eats the fruits. He thirsts; and pledging

> 'all the mortals of the world
> And all the dead whose names are on our lips
> Drank.'

The draught is an opiate which causes him to sink into a profound sleep. On waking he finds himself in a temple of vast size. At the western end of this sanctuary he sees an immense image, before which a veiled figure ministers. A sacred fire burns before the shrine. Out of the smoke a voice issues, saying:

> 'If thou canst not ascend
> These steps, die on that marble where thou art.
> Thy flesh, near cousin to the common dust,
> Will parch for lack of nutriment — thy bones
> Will wither in a few years, and vanish so
> That not the quickest eye could find a grain
> Of what thou now art on that pavement cold.
> The sands of thy short life are spent this hour,
> And no hand in the universe can turn
> Thy hourglass, if these gummed leaves be burnt
> Ere thou canst mount up these immortal steps.'

A sublime dialogue follows, which shows the intensity of Keats's human quality, the nature of his thought, and his

conception of the function of art — a conception equal to that of the highest men of genius.

'"What am I that should so be saved from death?
What am I that another death come not
To choke my utterance sacrilegious, here?"
Then said the veiled shadow — "Thou hast felt
What 'tis to die and live again before
Thy fated hour, that thou hadst power to do so
Is thy own safety; thou hast dated on
Thy doom." "High Prophetess," said I, "purge off
Benign, if so it please thee, my mind's film."
"None can usurp this height," return'd that shade,
"But those to whom the miseries of the world
Are misery, and will not let them rest."'

. . . . .

'"Are there not thousands in the world," said I,
. . . "Who love their fellows even to the death,
Who feel the giant agony of the world,
And more, like slaves to poor humanity,
Labour for mortal good? I sure should see
Other men here; but I am here alone."
"Those whom thou spaks't of are no vision'ries,"
Rejoin'd that voice — "They are no dreamers weak,
They seek no wonder but the human face;
No music but a happy-noted voice —
They come not here, they have no thought to come —
And thou art here, for thou art less than they —

What benefit canst thou do, or all thy tribe,
To the great world? Thou art a dreaming thing."'

. . . . .

'"That I am favour'd for unworthiness,
By such propitious parley medecin'd
In sickness not ignoble, I rejoice,
Aye, and could weep for love of such award."
So answer'd I, continuing, "If it please,
Majestic shadow, tell me: sure not all
Those melodies sung into the World's ear
Are useless: sure a poet is a sage;
A humanist, physician to all men.
. . . Thou spakest of my tribe:
What tribe?"'

. . . . .

'"Art thou not of the dreamer tribe?
The poet and the dreamer are distinct,
Diverse, sheer opposite, antipodes.
The one pours out a balm upon the World,
The other vexes it."'

Then the veiled shade reveals that the sad and solitary temple is all that the thunder of war had spared of the monuments of the age of Saturn; that the statue of the sanctuary of which she is the priestess is that of the god. She herself is Moneta, and without causing the poet any suffering other than that of trance, she reveals to him the mysteries of the world. Together they descend to earth, and there 'Deep in

the shady sadness of a vale' they find Saturn, sleeping as if he were the very image in that temple they had left. Here Keats takes up the text of his first version, making the changes necessitated by his new attitude.

But the complete plan of both Hyperions remains for us a mystery.

XVII

His financial affairs were in a desperate state. He ceased to disturb himself any further about their probable course. Nor could he interest himself so deeply in his sister as before. He did not feel well enough to risk going as far as Walthamstow. To leave Fanny was a sacrifice which he could not bring himself to make. His will was exhausted; Brown's influence counted for nothing. And yet, without money, how could he marry? But was he even thinking of marriage? He was near Fanny, and that sufficed. Her kisses, her nearness, her care for him helped him to forget the torments into which he had been thrown by her gaieties. He looked no further than each passing day, dwelt in the happiness of the moment, and left the morrow to take care of itself. He made no attempt to relieve his own misery. At the bottom of his heart, though he might not have admitted it to himself, he knew that his friends would not leave him to die of hunger, that the disinterestedness of which he had given so many proofs would be repaid, if the situation demanded it.

Since he refused to earn his living by exercising, as he had the right to do, his profession as a surgeon, Mr. Abbey suggested that he should go in for tea brokerage. Keats considered the idea, but in the end it fell through; and, indeed, it was a fantastic suggestion to make to one of Keats's pride

and ardent temperament. These had already more or less alienated him from a society which never forgives those who hold it in contempt, or keep themselves at a disdainful distance. And then, too, although he did not know it, his name had already been erased from the list of the living by a subtle and fatal disease.

He was living in the company of fantastic dreams; the arrival of his brother George from America put those dreams to flight, and brought him abruptly back to realities.

George must have been hard pressed to have been induced to leave his wife and daughter. He wanted money, no matter at what cost, and as soon as possible, for he did not intend to stay long in London. He wanted to clear up a position which the mutual lendings and borrowings between the brothers had made almost impossible to unravel. Keats gave him a free hand; and, thinking of Georgiana, who had remained for him, in the world of ideas, what the moon had been to him formerly in the realm of nature, his exquisite spirit was moved, and his vigour aroused; he wrote a delicious letter to the girl-wife, in order to amuse her, and to give her news of what her husband was thinking and doing; a letter touched with the humour of the 'heroical-comical' poem on which he was engaged.

He makes fun of George, who is full of praises of his little girl.

'We smoke George about his little girl. He runs the common-beaten road of every father, as I daresay you do of every mother: there is no child like his child, so orig-

inal, — original, forsooth! However, I take you at your words. I have a lively faith that yours is the very gem of all children. Ain't I its uncle?'

He jokes about Haslam in love, and laments the way in which that erstwhile pleasant companion has turned into a stupid one. He amuses himself at the expense of his friends, without malice, whenever he mentions their names.

'I know three witty people all distinct in their excellence — Rice, Reynolds, and Richards. Rice is the wisest, Reynolds the playfulest, Richards the out-o'-the-wayest. The first makes you laugh and think, the second makes you laugh and not think, the third puzzles your head. I admire the first, I enjoy the second, I stare at the third. The first is claret, the second ginger-beer, the third creme de Byrapymdrag. The first is inspired by Minerva, the second by Mercury, the third by Harlequin Epigram, Esq. The first speaks adagio, the second allegretto, the third both together. The first is Swiftean, the second Tom-Cribean, the third Shandean. And yet these three eans are not three eans but one ean.'

He can be more biting when he contents himself with leaving their names to be guessed:

'I know three people of no wit at all, each distinct in his excellence — A, B, and C. A is the foolishest, B the sulkiest, C is a negative. A makes you yawn, B makes you hate, as for C you never see him at all though he were six

feet high — I bear the first, I forbear the second, I am not certain that the third is. The first is gruel, the second ditch-water, the third is spilt — he ought to be wip'd up. A is inspired by Jack-o'-the-clock, B has been drilled by a Russian sergeant, C, they say, is not his mother's true child, but she bought him of the man who cries, Young lambs to sell.'

But his depression shows itself:

'If you should have a boy, do not christen him John . . . 'tis a bad name, and goes against a man.'

Standing at Charing Cross and looking to all the points of the compass, he can see nothing but dullness. The earth seems to him a grotesque planet. All that men do, say and think can be summed up in a few meaningless syllables:

'Twang-dillo-dee — This you must know is the amen to nonsense. I know a good many places where Amen should be scratched out, rubbed over with ponce made of Momus's little finger bones, and in its place Twang-dillo-dee written. This is the word I shall be tempted to write at the end of most modern poems. Every American book ought to have it. It would be a good distinction in society. My Lords Wellington and Castlereagh, and Canning, and many more, would do well to wear Twang-dillo-dee on their backs instead of Ribbons at their button-holes; how many people would go sideways along walls and quickest hedges to keep their "Twang-dillo-dee" out of sight, or

wear large pig-tails to hide it. However there would be so many that the Twang-dillo-dees would keep one another in countenance — which Brown cannot do for me — I have fallen away lately. Thieves and murderers would gain rank in the world, for would any of them have the poorness of spirit to condescend to be a Twang-dillo-dee? "I have robbed many a dwelling house; I have killed many a fowl, many a goose, and many a Man (would such a gentleman say), but, thank Heaven, I was never yet a Twang-dillo-dee." Some philosophers in the moon, who spy at our globe as we do at theirs, say that Twang-dillo-dee is written in large letters on our globe of earth; they say the beginning of the "T" is just on the spot where London stands, London being built within the flourish; "wan" reaches downward and slants as far as Timbuctoo in Africa; the tail of the "g" goes slap across the Atlantic into the Rio della Plata; the remainder of the letters wrap around New Holland, and the last "e" terminates in land we have not yet discovered. However, I must be silent; these are dangerous times to libel a man in — much more a world.'

Mr. Abbey had always shown a certain affection for George, who, in the end, returned to Pittsburg with £700: his share of Tom's money, and also John's. Keats, through generosity or indifference to all except Fanny, said no word, and let himself be despoiled. The result of this indifference was soon, for him, sordid misery.

§

On Thursday, February third — so Brown tells us — Keats coming back from London, came into the house at Wentworth Place

> 'in a state that looked like fierce intoxication. Such a state in him, I knew, was impossible; it therefore was the more fearful. I asked hurriedly, "What is the matter? You are fevered?" "Yes, yes," he answered, "I was on the outside of the stage this bitter day till I was severely chilled — but now I don't feel it. Fevered! — of course, a little." He mildly and instantly yielded, a property in his nature towards any friend, to my request that he should go to bed. I entered his chamber as he leapt into bed. On entering the cold sheets, before his head was on the pillow, he slightly coughed, and I heard him say — "That is blood from my mouth." I went towards him; he was examining a single drop of blood upon the sheet. "Bring me the candle, Brown, and let me see this blood." After regarding it steadfastly he looked up in my face, with a calmness of countenance that I can never forget, and said, — "I know the colour of that blood — it is arterial blood — I cannot be deceived in that colour — that drop of blood is my death-warrant — I must die." I ran for a surgeon; my friend was bled; and, at five in the morning I left him after he had been some time in a quiet sleep.'

Brown busied himself about him, questioned Keats. He had been very injudicious, in travelling outside the coach,

and had been without the greatcoat and thick shoes which the doctor had ordered him to wear. The icy air of February had caught him, penetrated his system, numbed him, and the mischief was done. From that quiet sleep he woke to live through the first day of his 'posthumous existence.'

XVIII

His first thought was for Fanny Brawne, to whom he wrote:

> 'I shall send this the moment you return. They say I must remain confined to this room for some time. The consciousness that you love me will make a pleasant prison of the house next to yours. You must come and see me frequently: this evening, without fail — when you must not mind about my speaking in a low tone, for I am ordered to do so though I *can* speak out.'

Keats was now simply the passive victim of his appointed fate. All about him was silence. No faces save those of the doctor, Brown, and Fanny. An engraving of Hogarth's which happened to be there, before his eyes, worried him, and gave him nightmares.

Fanny, sympathetic and very sweet, tried to console and minister to him. The girl's absence and presence seemed to distress him equally. She had given up going out to parties and balls. She left him as little as possible. He suggested to her that their engagement should perhaps be broken off. She refused.

By what feeling was she animated? Love? The pride of being loved by a poet of genius? Did she at all realise what Keats was? Did she share the admiration, the conviction

that Brown and Dilke had in his future? Nothing up to then had proved incontestably that Keats was a great poet; and Fanny was only eighteen. Her military dancing-partners had taught her to appreciate the outward forms of glory: gold lace, medals, pensions. Had the doctors told her that Keats was incurably ill? Under such conditions, to accept a liberty which in any case must soon be hers would have been a needless cruelty. The pity which had seized her when Keats had spent his three ' dream-days ' near her had swallowed up all her love. It was now only pity. The word love which she still used had for her a new meaning, from which all idea of passion was withdrawn. She was maternal; and that was all to the good. The fact of being loved to frenzy by a man of genius seldom suffices to transform an ordinary young girl into an Egeria — though it might, perhaps, a woman.

Fanny loved Keats. As we have seen, she regarded the 25th of December, 1818, the evening of their secret betrothal, as the happiest day of her life. Keats, at that time, was happy. Fanny Brawne married someone else, but not till ten years after the poet's death. Was it for want of opportunity, or through faithfulness to a loved memory? Both hypotheses can be supported. She always called Keats her dear Keats. She refused to see Severn, who had been present when the poet breathed his last; yet she kept his letters carefully. She left them as a trust to her children, who authorised their publication. One of her remarks: ' the kindest act would be to let him rest for ever in the obscurity to which circumstances have condemned him ' has been wrongly interpreted.

She made it in connection with a request by Brown to allow him to publish one of Keats's letters to herself, which showed him exhausted morally and physically by disease. It is not evidence of a shallow nature for a woman to refrain from eternally lamenting her dead lover or husband. Did not Georgiana marry again after George's death?

§

Presently Fanny had to be forbidden the bedside of the invalid, who was dangerously roused to excitement by the silent tête-à-têtes, the conversations which as often as not had a bitter strain in them.

The two lovers now only exchanged daily notes; a simple good-night which he could slip under his pillow. He demanded no more. Sometimes she wished him good-night on the other side of the wall which separated them.

'Send me the words "Good-night" to put under my pillow,' he wrote to her. And to his sister Fanny he says that he is 'weak from the small quantity of food to which I am obliged to confine myself; I am sure a mouse would starve upon it.'

He lay in a state of half-consciousness. Fanny could be seen walking in the wintry garden, through the cold transparent panes of the window; she would pause in her walk, to wave to him. He saw her as Endymion saw Diana, and as Porphyro saw Madeline, in the likeness of a dream which should become a reality — for he hoped to recover. But he

feared lest this rôle of voluntary prisoner should weary the young girl, lest she should long to release herself from the yoke which had been imposed upon her. He begged her, himself, to take up a normal existence, to go to London, to amuse herself. He reassured her as to his own condition. All was not lost. When spring came they would resume their walks. He would recover like these same trees and flowering shrubs in the garden, which seemed so dead. When the rush of blood stifled him, after his crisis, he was heard to say that it was 'unfortunate.' It was not the fear of death that drew from him that cry, but the fear of rendering anxious those whom he held dear. He swears to Fanny by her own beauty, that when he has been forced to write to her on some unpleasant subject, it has always been with anxiety about her own happness. That unpleasant subject was her habit of flirting. Keats repented of having thought her something of a Cressida: the love which the young girl had acknowledged for him was rather a wonder than a sensuous delight.

They had made him up a sofa-bed in the sitting room; the least happenings which he saw in the outside world interested and delighted him. The minutes passed; and that was a divine day when, by subtle signs, he could see by Fanny's dress, when she appeared in the garden, that she had not left the house. He was in that state of wonder which convalescents, like children, know so well.

He wrote to his young sister, who was being kept away by Mr. Abbey, in the same way that the latter had done during Tom's illness, and for the same motives. The wholesale merchant carried his unkindness to the extent of not

allowing his ward her proper amount of pocket-money. Keats, indignant, hurt, could do nothing for Fanny except write to her. He told her all he saw:

> 'Old women with bobbins and red cloaks and unpresuming bonnets I see creeping about the heath. Gipsies after hare skins and silver spoons. Then goes by a fellow with a wooden clock under his arm that strikes a hundred and more. Then comes the old French emigrant (who has been very well to do in France) with his hands joined behind on his hips, and his face full of political schemes. . . . As for those fellows the Brickmakers they are always passing to and fro. I mustn't forget the two old maiden Ladies in Well Walk who have a Lap dog between them which they are very anxious about. . . . Carlo, our neighbour Mrs. Brawne's dog, and it meet some times. Lappy thinks Carlo a devil of a fellow and so do his Mistresses.'

But in all his letters whether to his sister or his friends he repeats the same warnings: to wrap up warmly, to take care of the health, and precautions against catching cold.

> 'Be very careful of open doors and windows and going without your duffle grey.'

It was to Rice, ill like himself, that he let himself go most completely. During the long and dreary months before his crisis, he declared, the beauties of nature had no more power over him.

'Now I like Claret, whenever I can have Claret I must drink it — 'tis the only palate affair that I am at all sensual in. Would it not be a good speck to send you some vine roots — could it be done? I'll enquire — if you could make some wine like Claret to drink on summer evenings in an arbour! For really 'tis so fine — it fills one's mouth with a gushing freshness — then goes down cool and feverless — then you do not feel it quarreling with your liver — no, it is rather a Peacemaker, and lies as quiet as it did in the grape; then, it is as fragrant as the Queen Bee, and the more ethereal Part of it mounts into the brain, not assaulting the cerebral apartments like a bully in a bad-house looking for his trull and hurrying from door to door bouncing against the wainscoat, but rather walks like Aladdin about his own enchanted palace so gently that you do not feel his step. Other wines of a heavy and spirituous nature transform a Man to a Silenus: this makes him a Hermes — and gives a Woman the soul and immortality of Ariadne, for whom Bacchus always kept a good cellar of Claret — and even of that he could never persuade her to take above two cups. I said this same Claret is the only palate-passion I have — I forgot game — I must plead guilty to the breast of a Partridge, the back of a hare, the backbone of a grouse, the wing and side of a Pheasant and a Woodcock *passim*. Talking of game (I wish I could make it), the Lady whom I met at Hastings and of whom I said something in my last I think has lately made me many presents of game, and enabled me to make as many.'

He kept up his interest in the literary world. With what joy did he not copy out the letter which Hazlitt, maltreated by the *Quarterly,* addressed to Gifford, the editor of that review:

> 'You say what you please of others; it is time you were told what you are. In doing this give me leave to borrow the familiarity of your style: for the fidelity of the picture I shall be answerable. You are a little person, but a considerable cat's paw; and so far worthy of notice. Your clandestine connection with persons high in office constantly influences your opinions and alone gives importance to them. You are the government critic, a character nicely differing from that of a government spy — the invisible link which connects literature with the Police.'

If Keats admired the great writer of the slip-shod appearance, the face and manners of a conspirator, for the depth of his taste, he admired him now no less for the courage which he displayed in attacking such an institution as the *Quarterly* and an individual so powerful as Gifford.

§

Brown these days was an amusing companion for Keats. He read him the fantastic story which he was engaged upon, of which the hero was the Devil, describing his affair with an old woman living in a forest. After various incidents the Devil

'himself falls in love with her, flies away with her to a desert place, in consequence of which she lays an infinite number of eggs — the eggs, being hatched from time to time, fill the world with many nuisances, such as John Knox, George Fox, Johanna Southcote, and Gifford.'

Keats's financial position grew steadily worse. Mr. Abbey informed him that he had very little money left. Poverty threatened the poet. He could not make up his mind as to what remunerative profession he should take up — whether to become a journalist, or to exercise his calling as a surgeon, and in order to succeed in this, to take up long and costly studies in Edinburgh; these seemed to him impossible solutions. He accused himself of carelessness, of idleness — but in reality it was nothing but disease, and the unconquerable obstacle of his temperament. It is as easy to imagine Balzac as an official, as Keats keeping a shop, or touting for custom. He reflected that after all, these difficulties were ones which he shared with the majority of men; he collected himself, tried to regain his balance, and his wish to do something good.

His dear sister-in-law Georgiana was not altogether happy over in America, amongst people with whom she had not much in common. In spite of her love for her husband, and her approaching motherhood, she was homesick for England. Keats tried to amuse her in his letters.

'Now you have by this time crumpled up your large Bonnet, what do you wear — a cap? Do you put your hair in papers of a night? do you pay the Miss Birkbecks

a morning visit — have you any tea? or do you milk-and-water with them — What place of Worship do you go to — the Quakers, the Moravians, the Unitarians, or the Methodists? Are there any flowers in bloom you like — any beautiful heaths — any streets full of Corset Makers? What sort of shoes have you to fit those pretty feet of yours? Do you desire Compliments to one another? Do you ride on Horseback? . . . Do you and Miss Birkbecks get groggy on anything — a little so-soish so as to be obliged to be seen home with a Lantern?'

He overwhelms her with ridiculous questions to which he begs an answer. He suggests to her for days of idleness or ill-humour fantastic ways of spending her time, in which the preparation of meals holds a large place.

'While you are hovering with your dinner in prospect you may do a thousand things — put a hedgehog into George's hat — pour a little water into his rifle — soak his boots in a pail of water — cut his jacket round into shreds like a Roman kilt or the back of my grandmother's stays — sew *off* his buttons.'

One Sunday, when going for a walk towards Highgate, he met one of his former professors from Guy's, in Coleridge's company. He stopped them deliberately — it was his first meeting with Coleridge, who, during a walk of about two miles, talked with his accustomed eloquence and garrulity, like a dreamer awakened, of a thousand subjects, a list of which Keats tried to give his brother.

'Nightingales, Poetry — on Poetical Sensation — Metaphysics — Different genera and species of Dreams — Nightmare — a dream accompanied with a sense of touch — single and double touch — a dream related — First and second consciousness — the difference explained between will and Volition — so many metaphysicians from a want of smoking the second consciousness — Monsters — the Kraken — Mermaids — Southey believes in them — Southey's belief too much diluted — a Ghost story — Good morning — I heard his voice as it came towards me — I heard it as he moved away — I heard it all the interval — if it may be called so.

All admirers of the 'sublime sleep-walker' will appreciate the sly malice of this picture.

Coleridge invited Keats to come and see him at Highgate. He pressed his hand at parting and, this pilgrim from the Beyond, this friend of ghosts, recorded afterwards in his Table Talk how he said to his companion: 'There is death in that hand.'

§

Thanks to the acuteness of his feelings, that is to say, of the intuitions of his spirit, Keats's intellectual growth was as rapid as his artistic progress, and he took account of it. The world was no more for him, as the Bible has it, a vale of tears. He calls it, in noble words, 'A Vale of Soul-Making.' These words come to his lips in that second chamber of the 'House of Life' where man 'originally a poor forked crea-

ture subject to the same mischances as the beasts of the forest,' pierces the mystery. Joys, sorrows, certainty of death — an overwhelming burden which bows him down, and which is only lightened first by knowledge, then by an acceptance of all things. These were the thoughts that the poetic genius of Keats brought to life, till they stood before him, like figures on a Greek vase.

> 'Suppose a rose to have sensation, it blooms on a beautiful morning, it enjoys itself, but then comes a cold wind, a hot sun — it cannot escape it, it cannot destroy its annoyances — they are as native to the world as itself: no more can man be happy in spite, the worldly elements will prey upon his nature.'

At the moment when he reached this philosophy of resignation, Keats was living intensely.

Dilke, completely swayed by his son, decided to take him to London. He went to settle in Westminster, and let his share of the house to the Brawnes. So now Keats and Fanny lived under the same roof, and saw each other at all hours of the day.

To his sister Keats wrote the most charming letters; she, too, was a person to be sustained, cheered, distracted, just as was Georgiana.

The child was not happy. Mr. Abbey wanted to take her away from school against her will, and exercised a very jealous supervision over her. The brother and sister were forbidden to meet, whether at Hampstead or at Walthamstow. They communicated with each other only by letter.

If Keats could not free his sister from the harsh care of the wholesale merchant, he could soften her captivity.

> 'On looking at your seal I cannot tell whether it is done or not with a Tassie — it seems to me to be paste. . . . Tell me if you have any or if you would like any — and whether you would rather have motto ones like that with which I seal this letter; or heads of great Men such as Shakespeare, Milton, etc., or fancy pieces of Art; such as Fame, Adonis, etc. — those gentry you read of at the end of the English Dictionary. Tell me also if you want any particular Book; or Pencils, or drawing-paper — anything but live stock. Though I will not now be very severe on it, remembering how fond I used to be of Goldfinches, Tomtits, Minnows, Mice, Ticklebacks, Dace, Cock salmons and all the whole tribe of the Bushes and the Brooks: but verily they are better in the Trees and the Water — though I must confess even now a partiality for a handsome Globe of gold-fish — then I would have it hold ten pails of water and be fed continually fresh through a cool pipe with another pipe to let through the floor — well ventilated they would preserve all their beautiful silver and Crimson.'

Sometimes, in his letters, he treats Fanny as if she were a grown-up person, and those letters in which there is question of money, or the attitude which she should adopt towards the Abbeys, we must conclude reached the child by a roundabout way, and by the help of her school-mistress.

To Fanny Brawne he confided his brotherly anxiety about his young sister. She was attached to Fanny Keats. She was only a few years older than the child. These sorrowful talks, during which Keats forgot his self-absorbed passion, and the presence of Brown, full of health and schemes, tempered the burning air which he breathed.

It was during these troubled months, so rich in fertile anxieties that this marvellous poet, in composing in a state of gracious enchantment, the *Belle Dame sans Merci,* and *Odes,* added notes hitherto undreamed of to the lyrical language of the world.

XIV

THERE is a phrase of Paul Claudel's which lets us more deeply into the soul and secret of Shakespeare than the pronouncements of more famous commentators. 'The finest thing about him,' he declares, 'is his Voices.' It is no less true of Keats.

And we must add the visions which they call up, their resonance, their subtle perfume, the magic which must conquer everyone who asks of poetry a complete subjugation of mind, heart, and senses. And they contain harmonies as cunningly blended as any in nature; themes developed in all the variations.

The inherent quality of the odes is not that of the diamond, white and cold, borrowing a reflected colour and fire from some external source of light, which makes it gleam by striking the facets into which it is cut. Their glowing perfection is rather like that of a pearl, which owes its lustre to itself alone, to the soft warmth of its form and texture.

There is a Keatsian ardour in lyric, just as we know, in painting, 'il fuoco giorgionesco.' The two artists have much in common. 'If poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree, it had better not come at all,' said Keats. By Poetry he did not mean the verbal gift, the power of writing verses, but that inspiration which cannot be forced by the will without disastrous results. Who can ever force the eagle to

leave or to return to the rocks of its eyrie? Who will dictate to the nightingale the hour at which she shall sing above her nest, whether it lie hidden at Verona, amongst the leaves of a pomegranate, or in the plum-tree that spread its branches before Fanny's window, in the garden at Wentworth place?

Exquisite song
'heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown.
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
The same that oft-times hath
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.'

The same song which now charmed the poet of the *Belle Dame sans Merci,* of the *Ode on Indolence, On Melancholy,* that company of beauty which dispute our favour; who begged

'for a draught of vintage! that hath been
Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth.
Tasting of Flora and the country green,
Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!
O for a beaker full of the warm South,
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple-stained mouth;
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
And with thee fade away into the forest dim.

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
What thou amongst the leaves hast never known,
The weariness, the fever, and the fret,
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last grey hairs,
Where youth grows pale and spectre-thin and dies;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs,
Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
Or new love pine at them beyond to-morrow.'

To die, whilst the immortal bird sings on over his grave for the generations yet to come, who, in their turn, will vanish away. . . .

Everything passes; Beauty alone remains, the law of the universe, Truth essential. That

'is all
Ye know, and all ye need on earth to know.'

It is the lesson which both the nightingale's song, and the figures on the Grecian urn have to teach us. Keats's deepest conviction was in the *Odes;* they were inspired by his truest, most profound instincts. His physical sensitiveness, which was so fine that he himself compared it to a snail's horn, there found expression. Whilst the nightingale sings

'I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
But in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
Wherewith the seasonable month endows,

The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
And mid-May's eldest child
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.'

Haydon insinuates that this extra sensitiveness was due to drink. The suggestion can be ignored. But the words fire, wings, wine are frequently on the poet's lips — wine, creator of joy, giver of oblivion.

§

Poetry and love had turned his mind away from material affairs, and now behold him abruptly face to face with a desperate situation.

Haydon was incessantly making pressing demands — commands, one might almost say — for money. The insane mystic, full of misfortunes, and in difficulties, but none the less a frenzied worker, and a firm believer in the sanctity of his mission, imposed upon him by God, expected his friend to be prepared to go to almost any length in order to help him.

The poet did not know where or how to try to raise money anew in order to help the painter. He could not ask Taylor again; he had already been over-generous, and although the poem had not succeeded, still valued *Endymion* highly.

Should he ask Abbey for an advance on his grandfather Jennings' estate? That would be madness. Abbey had no intention of putting himself out for his former ward. He was much too much a man of business not to be fully aware that the law-suit was bound to go on indefinitely, in view of the little means the Keats family had with which to finance it. Keats explained his situation to Haydon, frankly; and his own poverty soon reached such a point that he was compelled to ask the painter to repay the money which this last had borrowed. Relations between the two men became strained, and that entirely through the fault, the lack of delicacy, the lack of conscience of Haydon. Their friendship was a flame which died down and again flared up from time to time when the breath of unavoidable meeting fanned it, and brought Keats, on his part, some renewal of his former feeling.

But misfortune dogged him and his. The news from America was alarming. George had left the King of the Prairies; he had gone instead to Kentucky. There he had risked his small capital in a cargo boat which plied up and down the river. The boat went down, and he lost his money. This meant ruin. But cruel fate did not stop there. Mrs. Jennings, the widow of the naval officer, presumably because she was discontented with Abbey's methods, threatened a law-suit against the Jennings estate. She may have thought that she was acting in her nephew's interests; but the effect was to hold up everything, and make money harder than ever to come by, putting him still more at the mercy of the coffee merchant.

Keats, once more troubled by his throat, became desperate. He no longer contemplated going to Edinburgh to finish his studies in medicine. It had become necessary to earn a living as soon as possible. He therefore decided either to find some very cheap lodging in the country and write, or else to get a post as ship's doctor on board some Indiaman. This solution rather appealed to him because the time was drawing near when the methodical Brown would as usual let his house for the summer, pack his valise and knapsack, and go off for his change of air to the mountains or across the sea, or to be with his Abigail. The holiday of a literary epicurean, of which he described the pleasures — with the exception, of course, of those due to his mysterious mistress — in the evening, at the inn, after having laid out on the table first of all his paper, then his pens, last his bottle of ink.

Brown had the intelligent generosity of egoists of noble race, often more delicate and efficacious than the saintly disinterestedness of those who are solely tenderhearted. The malevolence of fate against Keats made him alarmed and indignant. A project of going with him to Belgium fell through. The state of health of the poet made great care necessary. Both Brown and Woodhouse disapproved of the Indiaman scheme; and Brown lent Keats the money he needed in order to be able to spend the summer, without worry, in the Isle of Wight, where Brown was to join him. He had suggested to Keats, who liked the idea, that they should write a play together. The subject was chosen: *Otho the Great, Emperor of Germany*. The plan was sketched. Keats wrote lines with Kean in his mind. The play was

intended for him. The part would certainly appeal to him; success could not fail. Whilst waiting for Brown's arrival, Keats was to spend his time thinking, reading plays over again, and enjoying the company of James Rice. Rice was ill, too, but an invalid who was very good company; that is to say in his capacity of gourmet, lover of life and good things, he fought, as far as possible, his depression, whether physical or moral, by opposing it to his inexhaustible spirits, good food and wine.

At the end of June Keats and Rice left for Shanklin.

XV

As dramatic criticism and poetry did not bring in enough to pay the expenses of setting up house, Reynolds had decided, now that he was engaged to be married, to go in for the law; he became an articled clerk in a lawyer's office. However, his work did not prevent him from writing, and he had just had a farce produced, called *One, Two, Three Four, Five,* which had had some success.

No doubt this success stimulated Keats's ambition, and when Brown suggested to him that they should collaborate in writing a play, he thought this would save the financial situation.

It was true that the idea of selling his pen to editors had disgusted him as much as, if not more than, the prospect of going in for medicine; but to acquire glory and money together quickly by means of the theatre, that is to say, not to pander to the public taste, but to train it, that was a magnificent adventure to attempt.

Brown was no novice. The success of his opera *Narevsky* had given him some fame in the theatrical world. He knew the ropes of the dramatic profession. To go into partnership with him was not in any way a loss of time; and the prospect of getting rich quickly and without chance of failure were the main factors in deciding Keats in favour of leaving Fanny and Hampstead to retire to the Isle of Wight.

those laughers. . . . Your name never passes my lip — do not let mine pass yours.'

A few visitors came to see him. Severn, whom he had not seen for a long time, was struck by his likeness to Tom.

Maria Gisborne, a friend of Shelley's, met him at Hunt's, on the day of his first blood-spitting in Kentish Town. They discussed Italian and English music, the style and voice of a fashionable singer. At a second interview the poet's looks distressed Mrs. Gisborne to such a degree that her husband wrote to Shelley giving an account of him, so gloomy as to move Shelley to invite him to stay with him at Pisa.

The *Lamia* volume appeared. Keats, too ill to do anything in the matter, had left everything to his publishers. When he received a copy and opened it, he was seized with anger. Without consulting him his publishers had added to the work an explanatory note with reference to *Hyperion:*

'If any apology be thought necessary for the appearance of the unfinished poem of HYPERION, the publishers beg to state that they alone are responsible, as it was printed at their particular request, and contrary to the wish of the author. The poem was intended to be of equal length with ENDYMION, but the reception given to that work discouraged the author from proceeding.'

Keats, on the copy given to Davenport, indignantly struck out these lines, writing at the top of the page:

'This is none of my doing — I was ill at the time.'

But beyond that he did nothing about it. It mattered little to him what was written or said about it, whether it was good or bad. He was thinking only of the passage of time, which brought nearer the moment of exile, and which he reckoned by heart-beats. For hours on end he remained motionless, a book on his knees, his pupils dilated, his gaze fixed in the direction of Hampstead. . . .

'My dearest Girl,

'I wish you could invent some means to make me at all happy without you. Every hour I am more and more concentrated in you; everything else tastes like chaff in my Mouth. I feel it almost impossible to go to Italy — the fact is I cannot leave you, and shall never taste one minute's content until it pleases chance to let me live with you for good. But I will not go on at this rate. A person in health as you are can have no conception of the horrors that nerves and a temper like mine go through. What Island do your friends propose retiring to? I should be happy to go with you there alone, but in company I should object to it; the backbitings and jealousies of new colonists who have nothing else to amuse themselves, is unbearable. Mr. Dilke came to see me yesterday, and gave me a very great deal more pain than pleasure. I shall never be able any more to endure the society of any of those who used to meet at Elm Cottage and Wentworth Place. The last two years taste like brass upon my Palate. If I cannot live with you I will live alone. I do not think my health will improve much while I am separated from you. For all this

I am averse to seeing you — I cannot bear flashes of light and return into my glooms again. I am not so unhappy now as I should be if I had seen you yesterday. To be happy with you seems such an impossibility! It requires a luckier Star than mine! It will never be. I enclose a passage from one of your letters which I want you to alter a little — I want (if you will have it so) the matter express'd less coldly to me. If my health would bear it, I could write a Poem which I have in my head, which would be a consolation for people in such a situation as mine. I would show someone in Love as I am, with a person living in such Liberty as you do. Shakespeare always sums up such matters in the most sovereign manner. Hamlet's heart was full of such Misery as mine is when he said to Ophelia "Go to a Nunnery, go, go!" Indeed I should like to give up the matter at once — I should like to die. I am sickened at the brute world which you are smiling with. I hate men, and women more. I see nothing but thorns for the future — wherever I may be next winter, in Italy, or nowhere, Brown will be living near you with his indecencies. I see no prospect of any rest. Suppose me in Rome — well, I should there see you as in a magic glass going to and from town at all hours. . . . I wish you could infuse a little confidence of human nature into my heart. I cannot muster any — the world is too brutal for me — I am glad there is such a thing as the grave — I am sure I shall never have any rest till I get there. At any rate I will indulge myself by never seeing any more Dilke or Brown or any of their Friends.

I wish I was either in your arms full of faith or that a Thunder bolt would strike me.

'God bless you. 'J. K.'

§

Taylor, converted by Woodhouse to an admiration for Keats, was full of enthusiasm. He was quite sure that there did not exist a poetic genius comparable to Keats; he was to be ranked with Milton and Shakespeare.

Blackwood having called on him, Taylor told him that a new volume of poems by Keats was appearing, and added that this would give the critics another opportunity of 'being witty at his expense.' A heated conversation ensued. Blackwood insisted that the previous articles against Keats had been by way of joke, and 'in the fair spirit of Criticism.' 'No,' replied Taylor, 'It was done in the spirit of the Devil.' Blackwood undertook to notice the *Lamia* volume.

He did nothing.

Taylor had plenty of courage in trying to make way with the public. The publishing house, young as it was, had had a great success with Clare's *Poems — Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery.*

Hunt defended the book; Lamb devoted a eulogistic article to it, but it was, unfortunately, anonymous. This was a want of courage on his part. His preference was for *Isabella;* for, for him 'an ounce of feeling is worth a pound of fancy.'

The *New Monthly* critic said that 'if he proceeds in the high and pure style which he has now chosen, he will attain

an exalted and a lasting station among English poets.' The *Monthly* praised *Hyperion; The British Critic* and the *Eclectic* gave restrained praise.

Keats's former enemies did not lay down their arms. A stupid piece of buffoonery on the part of the *Quarterly* contained a reference to a 'cockney apothecary,' from whom they had

> 'Brought off this pestle, with which he was capering,
> Swearing and swaggering, rhyming and vapouring:
> Seized with a fit of poetical fury,
>
> . . . . .
>
> Loud he exclaimed, "Behold, here's my truncheon;
> I'm the Marshal of poets — I'll flatten your nuncheon.
> Pitch physic to hell, you rascals, for damn ye, a —
> I'll physic you all with a clyster of Lamia."

The allusion was clear enough — and sinister.

§

Startled by Mr. Gisborne's letter, Shelley, in his own name and that of his wife, wrote very kindly, inviting Keats to spend the winter with them at Pisa. He advised him to go by sea to Leghorn, since France was not worth seeing. Then he continued:

> 'I have lately read your "*Endymion*" again, and ever with a new sense of the treasures of poetry it contains, though treasures poured forth with indistinct profusion.

> This people in general will not endure, and that is the cause of the comparatively few copies which have been sold. — I feel persuaded that you are capable of the greatest things, so you but will.'

He went on to ask whether Keats had received the *Cenci,* and told him that *Prometheus Unbound* was on its way, and spoke of having, in poetry, always avoided 'system and mannerism' — an unfortunate word, since it was precisely the chief defect with which the critics reproached Keats.

Shelley wrote to Mrs. Hunt of this hope of seeing Keats in Italy.

> 'I consider his a most valuable life, and I am deeply interested in his safety. I intend to be the physician both of his body and of his soul, to keep the one warm, and to teach the other Greek and Spanish. I am aware, indeed, in part, that I am nourishing a rival who will far surpass me; and this is an additional motive, and will be an added pleasure.'

Keats thanked Shelley very gratefully for his invitation, declined it, however, and then wrote about his poem. He excused himself as a bad judge of a work like the *Cenci;* saying that the only part of which he was a judge was the poetry and dramatic effect. But as the author of *Otho the Great* and especially of the four scenes of *King Stephen,* it was impossible that he should have failed to appreciate the beauty and courage of Shelley's tragedy. In excusing himself, he ventures on one or two criticisms:

'You might curb your magnanimity, and be more of an artist, and load every rift of your subject with ore. The thought of such discipline must fall like cold chains upon you, who perhaps never sat with your wings furled for six months together. . . . I am in expectation of *Prometheus* every day. Could I have my wish effected, you would have it still in manuscript, or be but now putting an end to the second act. I remember you advising me not to publish my first blights, on Hampstead Heath. I am returning advice upon your hands.'

The two letters are fine, and worthy of their writers, but their tone explains clearly enough the impossibility of real friendship between the two poets.

Keats made his will and sent it to Taylor. He asked him to divide his books amongst his friends, then added:

'All my Estate real and personal consists in the hopes of the sale of books publish'd or unpublish'd. Now I wish Brown and you to be the first paid Creditors — the rest is nubibus — but in case it should shower pay my Taylor the few pounds I owe him.'

Keats had known every great hope, every great despair and disillusion that life could hold. He was yet to know its pettinesses.

Haydon, careless of his friend's condition, discontented perhaps over the tempered enthusiasm shown about *Christ's Entry into Jerusalem,* still unable to forgive him for hav-

ing failed to work a miracle and come to his aid financially, asked for the return of a copy of Chapman's *Homer* which he had once lent him. Keats had lost the copy. He bought another. Haydon came to see him. He found him

> 'lying in a white bed with a book, hectic and on his back, irritable at his weakness and wounded at the way he had been used. He seemed to be going out of life with a contempt for the world and no hopes of the other. I told him to be calm, but he muttered that if he did not soon get better he would destroy himself.'

Haydon ought to have regretted his action; and Keats must have forgotten his just anger, and only remembered their past friendship. . . .

Not long after this, a servant of Hunt's held back a letter from Fanny, read it, kept it for a day, and allowed it to reach Keats indirectly, but in a way that showed what she had done. Keats immediately left the Hunts after a stay of seven weeks. He returned to Hampstead. The Brawnes would not hear of his going to Bentley's, and took him into their own house.

XX

At Wentworth Place Keats spent the most peaceful days of his life. His friends took charge of the preparations for his departure. Keats did not attempt to hurry them on. Nor did they hasten on their part. The late summer was soft and pleasant, and they wished to keep Keats with them as long as possible.

On the eve of departure Keats found himself without money. The insistent question came before him up to his last breath. His brother George had not yet sent the money which was expected from America; indeed, no news had been received of him; and Brown was still away. All those to whom he might have appealed were themselves short of money. How could he explain his difficulty to Fanny's mother? In the end he once more applied to Taylor, in whose debt he already was.

The names of Taylor, Woodhouse and Hessey should stand high in the estimation of men of letters. These honourable men, moved to their depths by the burden of trouble which crushed their author, did all in their power to relieve him. They gave him a letter of credit for £150, and said that they would regard this and their previous loans as advances on the value of his literary work. Keats, they were convinced, would be a great poet, and would make his way with the public some day. Hessey, the business head of

the firm, but no less a man of fine feeling than his partner, had subscribed a hundred and sixty advance copies — and a copy of *Endymion* had been asked for by some unknown purchaser.

The publishers did not stop there. They made arrangements by which the letter of credit would be honoured, and negotiated through an English house of business at Naples. And Taylor made arrangements for his journey, taking a berth for him on board the brig *Maria Crowther* which was sailing for Naples towards the middle of September.

It was not possible for Keats to go alone. He needed a travelling companion who should also be, if need arose, a sick nurse. Haslam thought of Severn; and the painter musician did not hesitate to accompany the poet.

Keats and Severn had become acquainted in 1815 at the Wylies, where Haslam had introduced them to each other. A lively friendship had arisen between them. Severn's father was a music teacher. He himself had some musical talent, and he was able to introduce to Keats the work of Mozart, Haydn, Clementi, and to show him what painting might be. Keats, in return, revealed the beauties of poetry to him. Severn was poor. In order to be able to finish his picture for the Royal Society's Gold Medal, he had had to sell his watch and books. He was a young man of not very striking appearance, and a sentimental expression, very sensitive and diffident. He had won the Gold Medal above referred to. He has been represented as a man who, realising that he was not a great artist, had hoped to make himself a name by

becoming the 'Fidus Achates' of Keats, tirelessly painting the poet, full face, in profile, and in every possible pose; putting down his least remarks in his journal; describing all his gestures. He helped the case against himself by saying:

> 'Of all I have done with brush or pen, as artist and man, scarce anything will long outlast me . . . yet through my beloved Keats I shall be remembered.'

He saw his hero in his beauty, which is to say in his truth. He explained to Keats that a prolonged stay at Rome would be the greatest good fortune to him, as a painter. He would work in the museums, perfect his art, win a scholarship — but he forgot to mention that he, too, was without funds. He went to London to collect twenty-five pounds which were owed to him by a lady, the price of a miniature; and this sum, together with a letter of introduction from Sir Thomas Lawrence to Canova, made his entire fortune.

Those were brave days, when love of art gave birth to noble attachments between men, of a kind which in our day would only be roused on the battle-field.

On September 8th Keats bade farewell to Fanny. She was against this journey, but said nothing. Later she declared:

> 'His recovery was impossible before he left us, and he might have died here with so many friends to soothe him and me *me* with him.'

Keats spent a few days with Taylor in London.

To leave his young sister, his other Fanny, what rending of the heart!

On the seventeenth of September, Taylor and Keats threaded the quays of London, and boarded the *Maria Crowther*. Severn joined them with his brother, and so did Woodhouse and Haslam. Severn's passport had not come in time, and Haslam undertook to get it to the ship before she sailed the next morning. Keats was thinking of Reynolds, and Brown. . . .

There was one passenger already on board, a lady, Mrs. Pidgeon.

Woodhouse and Haslam accompanied the travellers as far as Gravesend. Severn went ashore there, and made some purchases at the chemist's for Keats, including a bottle of laudanum. At the moment of parting Woodhouse cut off a lock of Keats's hair. The brig did not slip her moorings until the following morning.

During the night a fishing smack came to anchor not far from the *Maria Crowther;* aboard her was Brown, on his way to London. The two friends might have seen each other again.

After some days, going ashore at Portsmouth, Keats was able to visit the Snooks at Bedhampton, where he spent the night, his last night in England. Brown was actually only ten miles away, at Chichester with old Mr. Dilke. But again they failed to meet. Bedhampton, Chichester, the days of his betrothal to Fanny Brawne, of the *Eve of Saint Agnes!*

He wrote to Brown:

'My dear Brown — The time has not yet come for a pleasant letter from me. I have delayed writing to you from time to time, because I felt how impossible it was to enliven you with one heartening hope of my recovery; this morning in bed the matter struck me in a different manner; I thought I would write "while I was in some liking," or I might become too ill to write at all; and then if the desire to have written should become strong it would be a great affliction to me. I have many more letters to write, and I bless my stars that I have begun, for time seems to press — this may be my best opportunity. We are in a calm, and I am easy enough this morning. If my spirits seem too low you may in some degree impute it to our having been at sea a fortnight without making any way. I was very disappointed at not meeting you at Bedhampton, and am very provoked at the thought of you being at Chichester to-day. I should have delighted in setting off for London for the sensation merely, — for what should I do there? I could not leave my lungs or stomach or other worse things behind me. I wish to write on subjects that will not agitate me much — there is one I must mention and have done with it. Even if my body would recover of itself, this would prevent it. The very thing which I want to live most for will be a great occasion of my death. I cannot help it. Who can help it? Were I in health it would make me ill, and how can I bear it in my state. I daresay you will be able to guess on what subject I am harping — you know what was my greatest pain during the first part of my illness at your house. I wish for

death every day and night to deliver me from these pains, and then I wish death away, for death would destroy even those pains which are better than nothing. Land and sea, weakness and decline, are great separators, but death is the great divorcer for ever. When the pang of this thought has passed through my mind, I may say the bitterness of death is passed. I often wish for you that you might flatter me with the best. I think without my mentioning it for my sake you will be a friend to Miss Brawne when I am dead. You think she has many faults — but for my sake think she has not one. If there is anything you can do for her by word or deed I know you will do it. I am in a state at present in which woman merely as woman can have no more power over me than stocks and stones, and yet the difference of my sensations with respect to Miss Brawne and my sister is amazing. The one seems to absorb the other to a degree incredible. I seldom think of my brother and sister in America. The thought of leaving Miss Brawne is beyond everything horrible — the sense of darkness coming over me — I eternally see her figure eternally vanishing. Some of the phrases she was in the habit of using during my last nursing at Wentworth Place ring in my ears. Is there another life? Shall I awake and find all this a dream? There must be, we cannot be created for this sort of suffering. The receiving this letter is to be one of yours. I will say nothing about our friendship, or rather yours to me, more than that, as you deserve to escape, you will never be so unhappy as I am. I should think of — you in my last mo-

ments. I shall endeavour to write to Miss Brawne if possible to-day. A sudden stop to my life in the middle of one of these letters would be no bad thing, for it keeps one in a sort of fever awhile. Though fatigued with a letter longer than any I have ever written for a long while, it would be better to go on for ever than awake to a sense of contrary winds. We expect to put into Portland Roads to-night. The captain, the crew, and the passengers are all ill-tempered and weary. I shall write to Dilke. I feel as if I was closing my last letter to you.

'My dear Brown, your affectionate friend,

'John Keats.'

At Gravesend a young girl, Miss Cotterell, also a consumptive, came on board the *Maria Crowther*.

§

Just before leaving London Keats had received a letter from Woodhouse, and in it he read these moving words:

'There are many who take more than a brotherly interest in your welfare. There is certainly

". . . . one, whose hand will never scant
From his poor store of fruits all thou canst want."

And he is

Yours very sincerely and affectionately,

"Richard Woodhouse." '

'Saturday night, 16th Sep., 1820.'

§

Severn's journal tells the least incidents of the passage; seasickness; storm; thoughtful attentions on the part of Keats for Miss Cotterell: she was stifled if the cabin windows were not open; if they were open, then Keats coughed violently, sometimes to the point of spitting blood; there was an encounter with a Portuguese man-of-war which stopped and questioned them; quarantine at Naples: English visitors, amongst whom Miss Cotterell's brother imprudently boarded the brig, in order to bring them flowers and grapes, and was detained by the officials.

Naples, seen in bad weather, disillusioned Keats. The voyage had tired him terribly. The character of the Neapolitans, that of their King Ferdinand, slave of the Austrians, the town itself, disappointed him. He read the whole of *Clarissa Harlowe,* in nine volumes, in his room at the Villa da Londra. He commended Fanny to Brown's friendship once more, desperately.

A letter from Shelley urged him to come to Pisa — though not offering him hospitality.

In acknowledgment of his attentions to Miss Cotterell, her brother gave a farewell dinner for her travelling companion accompanied by Falernian wine. Then Keats and Severn took the road for Rome, travelling by carriage, and arrived there, by easy stages, on November 17th.

They settled down in the Piazza di Spagna, at the bottom of the steps leading from it to the Trinitá dei Monte. Doctor Clark, who had found the lodgings, lived near by. On his advice Keats hired a horse on which to ride about. He also hired a piano on which Severn played to him. The

Coliseum, rising amongst a mass of ruins, covered richly with green, astonished him. In the country the sudden sight of a cardinal dressed in purple, with two liveried attendants, shooting singing birds attracted by means of a captive owl, struck him sharply by its unusualness and must have increased his sense of exile.

He made friends with an English officer, in Italy for reasons of health. Both saw and admired on the Corso the Princess Pauline Borghese, who, it seems, noticed Keats's friend.

The monuments, the ruins soon wearied him. He saw them without pleasure or curiosity. He did not want Severn to spend all his time with him, and begged him to set to work.

He read the Italian poets. Alfieri's lines

> 'Misera me! sollievo a me non resta
> Altro che'l pianto, ed il pianto é diletto'

overcame him. Agony had come upon him again. Only music soothed him.

On December 10th and the following days he began to cough up blood — and it was an agony of which Severn, hour by hour, noted the progress.

The stricken, wandering eagle, had found a refuge where he might fold his wings to die.

§

Keats asked Severn whether he had ever seen anyone die. He realised what his own sufferings would be, and begged

him not to be afraid. Hemorrhages; indigestion; depression. And then there were money difficulties; there was trouble about Taylor's letter of credit; and difficulties with the authorities; they kept this house with a consumptive in it under surveillance. The police waited for him to breathe his last, for by the Italian laws every object in the rooms where the disease had been must be burnt.

In his rare moments of lucidity and calmness, Keats, a tragic pilgrim through the 'Vale of Soul-making,' shows himself to us in all his humanity. Not a violent word or movement, nor a selfish thought. He sank with a pathetic tranquillity and gentleness.

> 'I pity you, poor Severn. What trouble and danger you have got into for me. Now you must be firm for it will not last long — I shall soon be laid in the quiet grave.'

Always the word *quiet*.

> 'O! I can feel the cold earth upon me — the daisies growing over me — O for the quiet — it will be my first. How long will this posthumous life of mine last?'

That was his only cry of revolt.

Severn, at the end of his strength, sometimes fell asleep at the invalid's bedside. In order not to leave him in darkness, he connected the candles by a thread; and Keats, one night, seeing the flame run along the thread, cried: 'O! Severn'

here's a little fairy lamp-lighter actually lit up the other candle.'

He talked to them of the place in the English cemetery where he would be buried, near the pyramid of Caius Cestus, in a place that overflowed with violets. And he begged that for epitaph there might be written on his tomb the words

Here lies one whose name was writ in water.

Severn read aloud to him Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living* and *Holy Dying*.

§

The end came; his last words were: 'Severn — I — lift me up — I am dying — I shall die easy; don't be frightened — be firm, and thank God it has come.'

It was the twenty-third of February, about four o'clock. 'The phlegm seemed boiling in his throat. This increased until eleven at night, when he gradually sank into death, so quiet that I thought he slept,' wrote Severn. The exact moment at which his spirit fled is known to God alone. The autopsy showed that both lungs were entirely gone; the doctors could not understand how any human frame could have made so long and stubborn a resistance.

All through his illness Keats had constantly held in his hand an oval white carnelian given him by Fanny Brawne. Her letters to him he had not dared to open; he asked Severn that they might be buried with him.

The funeral procession that followed the coffin was a very

small one; it consisted of Severn, Dr. Clark, Dr. Luby, and one or two others. The burial service was read by Dr. Wolff.

By Dr. Clark's directions the grave was planted with daisy-tufts; ' this would be poor Keats's wish, could he know it,' he said.

NOTES

The work of Sir Sidney Colvin is, and will no doubt remain, the foundation of all writing which is inspired by the soul and genius of the poet of *Hyperion*.

Miss Amy Lowell has consecrated to Keats two immense volumes containing valuable documents. This was a life-work, and a magnificent labour which happily completes Colvin's researches. It is to Amy Lowell that we owe those small biographical details which are so invaluable for anyone who tries to bring to life again a period and a man. Miss Amy Lowell discovered a missing portion of one of those Journal-Letters which Keats wrote to his brother; and she has told us of Brown's liasion with Abigail Donohue. It is not possible, however, to agree entirely with her over-maternal judgments on Keats's work and character, complex as these were.

Mr. Middleton Murry's *Keats and Shakespeare,* is in our view, the most solid piece of criticism which has yet been produced on Keats as man and writer.

Mr. Clarence Dewitt Thorpe has applied himself to showing in relief Keats on his philosophical side, and has succeeded.

Review articles — French and foreign — concerning Keats are too numerous to mention here. The editions of Keats

usually contain a list. Consult also the Keats-Shelley Memorial (Macmillan 1913).

For the letters of Keats, we have used Sir Sydney Colvin's edition (Macmillan, 1925); and Buxton Forman's (Gowans and Gray, Glasgow, 1901). There are many editions of the Poems. That of Mr. E. de Selincourt (Methuen, London, 1905) is indispensable for the student who wishes to possess the work of Keats in full. We have followed Buxton Forman's text (Oxford University Press, 1908).

Did *Hyperion: a Fragment* follow or precede *The Fall of Hyperion: a Dream?* The question has set the critics by the ears. But — in agreement with Mr. Middleton Murry and others, and against Amy Lowell — it seems to us evident that the *Dream* came after the *Fragment.* Therefore we have not considered it necessary to describe in full this debate amongst the specialists.